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Dramatic Criticism

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Vol. IV

1902-1903

By J. T. Grein



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Eveleigh Nash

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TO

A. G.

WHO HAS INSPIRED MANY OF

MY HAPPIEST THOUGHTS

J. T. G.

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Preface

THIS is the fourth volume of my reprinted notices of plays and actors, and again, albeit tardily, I offer it to those friends who have found its predecessors either agreeable as a record of the past or useful as a work of reference.

My apologies, therefore, to such as do me the honour of looking for my annual volume, and a promise (for what it, or its fulfilment, may be worth) to send out the next in better time.

If there is anything more to add here, it should be a word or two as regards my hopes for the drama in England. Looking always for improvement, I am, naturally, often charged with pessimism—I am a croaker. Well, I am bound to admit that the last article in this volume strikes even me as rather gloomy. I would not care to have my attitude judged by that one article, nor, in face of all that I have written at other times, do I think any one would do me that injustice. I advocate now, as I have before, the establishment of a British Theatre to be run on the *répertoire*

system. This would encourage the better men in the literary ranks to turn their attention to the stage, while a revival of the finest work of the past twenty-five years would, by showing what has already been done in serious drama, act as further incentive to produce work worthy of the great traditions of the drama in England.

J. T. G.

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ENGLISH PLAYS AND
ADAPTATIONS

THEATRE ROYAL, HAYMARKET : "FROCKS AND FRILLS"

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

JANUARY 5, 1902

I

I DO not think that it was quite courageous of Mr. Grundy to meet a somewhat derisive call for the author with the statement that not he, but the two Frenchmen, were responsible for the play. But he will, no doubt, settle that with his namesake, the famous British lady who sits in judgment on our manners and morals. What I want to point out is that neither Mr. Grundy nor Scribe and Legouvé have much to do with the Haymarket production, but that all the honours are due to the four dressmaking establishments who made the frocks, and to the actors who adorned them with frills of charming acting.

Stripped, if I may say so, of its finery, the play is but a very poor skeleton, conventionally and not too well built. After fifty years of French play-writing, it is somewhat late in the day to tell us the story of the impecunious girl of noble birth who is despised by her family so long as she is dependent, and whose shoe-strings everybody wants to tie as soon as, with her fairy-like fingers and finely-organised brain, she has built up a position and fortune, and justified pretensions to a high prize in the matrimonial market.

Of course, the real excuse for the existence of the play is the third act, in which we are introduced to the amusing mysteries of a fashionable dressmaking establishment; and when there, a beautiful woman like Miss Ellis Jeffreys is made to remove her bodice, and exhibit a camisole of delicate lace, a climax is hoped for which should be sufficient to draw the town.

Being of a sophisticated nature, I am not to be bamboozled by frocks, frills, and furbelows, and feel inclined to make straight for the heart of the thing. And then I come to the somewhat doleful conclusion that there is not an ounce of human nature in this play, and just as much nicely manufactured wit as is necessary to spice long explanations and not over-exciting dialogues. For the benefit of the crowd, the stuttering young Baronet, who was one of the most fascinating characters in the play of forty years ago, is now allowed to indulge in some twenty big "D's," but somehow the crowd grew weary of this compliment to its vulgarity, and when the account was finally settled the adapter had to pay the piper. I do not for a moment contend that there is not some cleverness in Mr. Grundy's version, for a man of his intellect could not fail to infuse some brightness even into the narrative of a time-worn story. But the main objection is that the game is not worth the candle, and that his energies might have been better employed. We all know that Mr. Grundy is the prophet of the well-made play. His is the play in which every joke, every situation, every morsel of comic relief, every piece of furniture, has its mathematically-appointed place. Every method, however, has its day, and even the agreeable wardrobe, which covered a multitude of sins, was unable to conceal the old-fashioned cut of antiquated Parisian material.

II

The criticisms of Mr. Grundy's principal contributors, Mesdames Nettleship and Lucile, and Messrs. Jay and Paquin, must be left to tenderer hands than mine. I admire their play-writing, but it is beyond my power to analyse it. Coming to the actors, it may be ungrudgingly admitted that their efforts were worthy of a better play, and no wonder, for there were such excellent exponents in the cast as Mrs. Charles Calvert, the sprightly Miss Lottie Venne, Miss Ellis Jeffreys, who is always fascinating, and Messrs. Aynesworth and Eric Lewis, a little band which would lead any forlorn hope to victory.

But the interest of the evening centred in Mr. Cyril Maude and in Miss Grace Lane, now, for the first time, entrusted with a part of no mean importance. Mr. Maude reached his high-water mark in *The Second in Command*, and it is scarcely a compliment to him to say that he surpassed himself. But it is undeniable that in the whole of his career Mr. Maude has scarcely had so difficult a task as in this artificial part of a *ne plus ultra* stutterer. The character affords every opportunity for degeneration into mere clownery; therefore, an actor of great refinement was required to adapt it to the frame of pure comedy. This is what Mr. Maude did; he spoke every line, he valiantly struggled with some two dozen "damns," but he did not over emphasise. He tried to make the thing plausible, and succeeded so well that we are not likely soon to forget good Sir Richard Kettle. Miss Grace Lane, too, had a little world of weight to carry on her young shoulders. Whatever human nature could be instilled into the universal-providing character of the wonderful lady dressmaker must be her own; the author gave her merely words which required more than ordinary amplification, and therefore threatened many a pit-fall.

That Miss Lane built of such material a womanly picture of great winsomeness and no apparent affectation, proves that her talent is capable of great development. She showed us something of the "fairy hands" which in our younger days rendered the original of *Frocks and Frills* a famous play in Continental Europe.

“ MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION ”

JANUARY 12, 1902

I

It was an exceedingly uncomfortable afternoon. For there was a majority of women to listen to that which could only be understood by a minority of men. Nor was the play fit for women's ears. By all means let us initiate our daughters before they cross the threshold of womanhood into those duties and functions of life which are vital in matrimony and maternity. But there is a boundary line, and its transgression means peril—the peril of destroying ideals. I go further. Even men need not know all the ugliness that lies below the surface of everyday life. To some male minds too much knowledge of the seamy side is poisonous, for it leads to pessimism, that pioneer of insanity and suicide. And, sure as I feel that most of the women, and a good many of the men, who were present at the production of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* by the Stage Society, did not at first know, and finally merely guessed, what was the woman's trade, I cannot withhold the opinion that the representation was unnecessary and painful. It is mainly for these reasons that, in spite of my great admiration for Bernard Shaw, the play was not brought out by the late Independent Theatre. As a “straight talk to men only” it is not sufficiently true to life to be productive of an educational effect. As a drama it is unsatisfactory, because

the characters have no inner life, but merely echo certain views of the author. As literature, however, the merits of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* are considerable, and its true place is in the study.

II

Mrs. Warren's Profession is a "problem play" in the fullest sense of the word. Mr. Shaw will probably deny it, and claim that it is ordinary actable drama, but the text will give evidence in my favour. We hear Mr. Shaw all the time, and whatever vitality the characters possess is not their own, but Mr. Shaw's. They own also much of his contradictory elements—his depth of observation and thought and his extraordinary "cussedness." Here, as in most of G. B. S.'s work, the sublime is constantly spoilt by the ridiculous. It is the author's manner, and his way to express his contempt for the public. But that is a mere side issue. The main point is whether the problem is worth discussing and whether it has been dealt with in an adequate, convincing manner. I say no on both counts. The problem is neither vital nor important. It has none of the *raison d'être* of *Le Fils de Coralie* by Delpit, of *La Dame aux Camelias*, or of *Ghosts*. The case of Mrs. Warren has been invented with such ingenuity and surrounded by such impossibilities that it produces revolt instead of reasoning. For Mr. Shaw has made the great mistake of painting all the male characters with a streak of a demoralised tar brush; he has created a cold-blooded, almost sexless daughter as the sympathetic element: and he has built the unspeakable Mrs. Warren of such motley material that in our own mind pity and disgust for the woman are constantly at loggerheads. If the theme was worth treating at all the human conflict was the tragedy of the daughter through the infamy of the mother. Instead of that we

get long arguments—spiced with platform oratory and invective—between a mother really utterly degraded, but here and there whitewashed with sentimental effusions, and a daughter so un-English in her knowledge of the world, so cold of heart, and “beyond human power” in reasoning that we end by hating both; the one who deserves it, as well as the other who is a victim of circumstances. Thus there are false notes all the time, and apart from a passing interest in a few scenes, saved by the author’s cleverness, the play causes only pain and bewilderment, while it should have shaken our soul to its innermost chords.

It is not so easy to explain this singular effect, or, rather, it would be easy if it did not behove us to touch this work—in a newspaper—with kid-gloved fingers. Mr. Shaw, in his attempt to portray a woman of Mrs. Warren’s type, either lacked the courage to play *misere-ouverte*, or, what is more likely, he had not sufficient knowledge of the monstrosity of such beings. His Mrs. Warren is a black soul with spots of human feeling dotted on in whitish chalk. But the real Mrs. Warren is the most abject creature in all humanity. I cannot say more. I can but refer Mr. Shaw to Parent-Duchatel, to Yves Guyot, to Dr. Commange, to Leo Taxil’s “Corruption Fin de Siècle”—to a whole library on the colossal subject of human debasement. If Mr. Shaw had fully known the nature of Mrs. Warren’s profession he would have left the play unwritten, or produced a tragedy of heartrending power. Now he has merely philandered around a dangerous subject; he has treated it half in earnest, half in that peculiar jesting manner which is all his own. He has given free rein to his brain and silenced his heart. He has, therefore, produced a play of a needlessly “unpleasant” understructure to no useful end. A play that interests in part, repels in others; a drama that plays fast and loose with our emotions, and will

in some awaken a curiosity which had better been left in slumber.

III

It is the fashion in some quarters to express condolence with the actors when a play is of an outspoken, unpleasant nature. I see no reason for such uncalled-for patronage. Condolence is in its right place when talent is wasted on futility; but when actors of their own accord choose to appear in works of uncompromising candour, they should be criticised in the ordinary way, and not humiliated by doubtful apologies. Artists like Miss Fanny Brough, Miss Madge McIntosh, like Mr. Granville Barker and their companions, know full well what they do when they appear in plays like *Mrs. Warren's Profession*; they know also that writers like Mr. Shaw have no ulterior motives when they deal with strong subjects, and that they afford great chances of distinction to the actor.

The performance of *Mrs. Warren's Profession* proved no exception to the rule. In spite of the disadvantage of a cramped stage and impracticable scenery in the theatre of the Lyric Club, the acting reached the highest mark. Miss Fanny Brough, a woman of more brain and heart than half a dozen of our more or less leading ladies *en bloc*, achieved that which had long been predicted by her admirers. She proved that she is not only a splendid *comédienne*, but that she is endowed with the profounder gifts which characterise tragic actresses. Whatever vitality the character of Mrs. Warren now and again seemed to achieve, whatever feeling of sympathy was aroused in the spectator, sprung from Miss Brough's magnificent impersonation. She had to play upon the entire clavier of emotions, and in that exceedingly difficult concerto there was not a wavering note, let alone an inharmonious chord. The younger actress, Miss McIntosh, was also fully

equal to her task. She did her best to minimise the frigid side of the daughter's strange character, and to kindle every little spark of womanhood into flame. Her performance betrayed great study and a carefully planned conception of a part which in less capable hands would seriously try the patience and the sense of humour of the audience.

But the play was admirably cast from first to last, Mr. Charles Goodhart and Mr. Julius Knight, Mr. Granville Barker and Mr. Cosmo Stuart, they all worked with an ardour unwonted in any theatre except where "art for art's sake" is the motto.

AVENUE : "AFTER ALL"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY FREEMAN WILLS AND
F. LANGBRIDGE

JANUARY 19, 1902

I

COMMEND me to the Reverends Freeman Wills and Frederick Langbridge for compressing the Ten Commandments into a so-called wholesome melodrama! Excepting coveting one's neighbour's wife—for which there was no opportunity, as there was no wife, but only a maid or two and a widow in the cast—every mortal offence forbidden by the Decalogue is to be found in this play of *After All*. There are seduction, suicide, murder, burglary, perjury. There is a copious, and in my estimation, wanton invocation of the Name Divine; there are terrible bores who clowned ten minutes in the second act for comic relief's sake. There are also a couple of pistol shots, a trial-scene, an endless-wire speech for the defence (by the actor-manager), and yet, with all this ado, the melodrama is nothing more than mediocre. It is even a trifle worse than that, for it is pompous.

In old times, melodrama was merely a compilation of situation: dialogue did not much matter, and quality was not expected—no more than the painter's fine touch in an oleograph print. It was unpretentious fare for the unpretentious, and the simpler it was the better it went down, the more it pleased the masses and the

classes. Thus, in our time, we have all loved the *Two Orphans*, the *Ticket-of-Leave-Man*, and such like, because they were frankly inartistic, and exciting by their amazing dexterity of construction. But nowadays melodrama loves to give itself airs. It scorns the appellation "Melodrama," which savours of "no class"; it calls itself "romantic drama," and sometimes, as in the present case, "a new and original play."

A *new* and *original* play "suggested" by Lord Lytton's novel!

With the exaltation in rank there must go hand in hand exaltation in style, and so the shoddy material of the harrowing school is adorned with rhetorical flowers and blossoms of fine writing. Unfortunately, the pattern and the decorations do not match—the sensational and the practical are discordant bedfellows, and in the unequal pairing both must suffer. The fine writing spoils the play, and the play spoils the fine writing. It is hard for the authors who have done their best to besprinkle their manner of expression with the lilac-like scent of Maeterlinck's symbolism; but it is the truth. If they had stuck to melodrama, as they did in *The Only Way*, *After All* would probably have scored a success. But too much finery has blurred the time-honoured picture.

II

From a purely dramatic point of view, the authors, after starting well on precisely the same lines as in *The Only Way*, have made the mistake of slackening the interest in the course of the action's progress. The real drama began when Eugene Aram, accused of murder, was bidding farewell to his bride. If she had loved him, there would have been the great conflict between love and anguish—real drama therefore. But Eugene was not truly beloved by Madeleine—her heart

was her cousin's all the time. Eugene was the grande passion of Nancy, the other and less prominent Miss Orchard, whom he merely liked, but would not even accept when he sought a new life to expiate his past. Thus, when Madeleine, hearing that he has committed murder, refuses to crave Heaven's blessing for Eugene, we feel no pang. We find it natural that she turns away; for her, at any rate, the detection of the crime is a good riddance. This knowledge that there is no love-conflict at stake robs the trial scene of its main interest. Eugene now merely fights for his life, and as he has indeed a guilty conscience, there is little in his defence to appeal to our sympathy. After all, murder, even committed under provocation, remains a heinous offence, and, having heard what Eugene had to say to whitewash his character, we cannot but agree with the judge that the verdict of *Not Guilty* was misguided. Moreover, the defence itself was bad. It was technically awry, badly written, and entirely failed when, for the sake of a poor joke, the circumstantial evidence of the murdered man's bones is linked to the trivial expression of "making no bones about it." Altogether, this Eugene Aram of the play is but a poor descendant of the renowned Eugene whom Lytton the Magnificent rendered immortal.

III

The actors were sorely tried by the play. They all seemed to try to make bricks without straw. It was words all the time, and except Miss Mabel Terry-Lewis—who makes good progress, and in a powdered wig reminded one of her comely aunt Ellen—no one had a real opportunity. But Miss Terry-Lewis wrestled valorously with her rather colourless part. She wafted sweetness across the footlights, and when she played the harp and sang a pretty tune by Mr. Norman O'Neill, voice and touch told us more plainly than

words how much true feeling their lives in this young actress. Mr. Martin Harvey—always a fine picture of a *pater doloroso*—did not seem quite comfortable in his part. It was no doubt for him that the authors introduced mild philosophy of a hazy meaning. Mr. Harvey is the high priest of dreamland-poetry, he excelled in *Pelleas and Melisande*, and he has been maeterlincking ever since. I think that it is well to warn him that too much atmosphere is likely to produce evaporation. Not every form of language sounds well in languid tones. There must be affinity between word and voice, such as the art of Maeterlinck demands ; but it is a far cry from *Pelleas* to *After All*, and for once Mr. Harvey's musical mutterings miss their wonted spell. I felt it notably in the speech for the defence in the last act. Here was a man on supreme trial, a man battling against terrible adversity, against overwhelming testimony. Such a man on such an occasion cannot bridle his feelings all the time. The aching heart must break down the fence of restraint. For anguish, like murder, will out ; and, in the outburst, all self-control goes to the winds. In Mr. Harvey's oration there was no agony, there was the soberness, the suppressed would-be emotion of a barrister ; but absent was the soul-stirring outcry of fathomless agony which would prompt a jury to acquit when the evidence unmistakably pointed to guilt. In other respects Mr. Harvey displayed his wonted skill, and often realised the position of a hunted conscience. But the trial scene was *la scène à faire*.

Upon its evolution, its phrasing, its rendering, depended the fate of the play ; and the fact that both authors and players failed to rise to the occasion accounts for the verdict that *After All* scored a victory of King Pyrrhus.

“MADEMOISELLE MARS”

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY PAUL KESTER

JANUARY 26, 1902

I

ONE touch of a stagey nature makes the whole world grin. The play had fairly run its not too exciting course, and there was every prospect that the world would go very well after Napoleon's gracious pardon to the lover of Mademoiselle Mars, when the author was unwise enough to drag in the culprit and let him and Mrs. Langtry indulge in recantation. That determined the gallery, and for awhile there was a blood-thirsty atmosphere in the house. Fortunately Mr. Kester deemed discretion the better part of valour, and declined the honour of being jeered at. But the incident in itself gave one matter for thought if the play itself did not. Here was a Napoleon story of the pattern which has become familiar since Sardou wrote that play of the laundress, "Sans-Gêne." Mr. Kester appropriated its ground-work, and in an equally festive mood he cut little slices out of the prototype and annexed them to his story. Thus, for instance, we have a general who is at least a half-brother of Sans-Gêne's husband, and Fouché is transplanted bodily from Sardou, including all the asininity which is sometimes part and parcel of policemen's ultra-smartness. Here was a play mounted by an actress renowned for her love of the luxurious and the exquisite; a fabulous

sum must have been spent on the dresses of Parisian manufacture and historical fidelity. Yet, in the anxiety to cut the garments aright, some details of the cloth were forgotten, and in this production, outwardly so correct, people spoke of "Mammesal," "Monsieur le Duke," and other atrocities. You will say, "A detail." I retort, "Perhaps so—but a detail which reveals the defects of a system." For the superficiality of the affair does not stop there. If Mr. Kester narrowly escaped an uncomplimentary reception, it was because, in all the wealth showered upon his work, not one of his henchmen, neither the manageress nor the stage director, neither the stage-manager nor the assistant stage-manager, proved to have any notion of that science indispensable in the theatre, yet entirely neglected over here, the optics of the stage. Anti-climax ruled supreme in every act, but in the final scene it destroyed the last chance. When, after Napoleon's act of clemency towards the actress' lover, who was rightly or wrongly (it isn't very clear) accused of an attempt on the Emperor's life, there was a reunion of the couple just to introduce a few final embraces, the public laughed. The veriest tyro at stagecraft, the veriest outsider present at the dress rehearsal might have nonplussed so ludicrous a mistake. For the rest it is an inoffensive play. On me it made the impression of the adroit allocutions wherewith our conjurers are wont to adorn their most obvious tricks. And certainly when Mdlle. Mars stole the heart-shaped muff of her rival, a copy of her own, which contained the Emperor's free pass, I certainly thought of Mr. Bertram and Carl Hertz, who would have done the sleight-of-hand with a dexterity infinitely more bewildering. As a mild amusement for people overfed with the amenities of the musical comedy, "Mdlle. Mars" may be recommended by way of an alternative. But he who would enter the theatre with the desire to be instructively amused, had better remember the fateful first lines of Dante's Divine Comedy.

LYRIC THEATRE: "MICE AND MEN"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY MADELEINE LUCETTE
RILEY

FEBRUARY 2, 1902

I

YES, there is something in a name. A pretty one raises hopes and expectations. An ugly one might just produce a wee suspicion of prejudice. *Mice and Men* is not a prepossessing title, and even the quotation from Burns, from which it is borrowed, does not render it more attractive. So people went to the theatre without much eagerness, and if the play had corresponded to its name there would have been little disenchantment.

Then the unexpected happened. After ten minutes' talking the coughers and the sniffers became as still as mice and as observant as men, and before the first act of the fairy tale was over the air was fraught with victory, which after the next descent developed into triumph. It was the triumph of the authoress and the young actress—the triumph of Sweet and Twenty over Trent et Quarante. In some respects *Mice and Men* resembles *The Professor's Love Story*, that pretty romance of young arms and the mature man. Thus you perceive the drift of the story. He of forty, in quest of a mate, selected a foundling to educate and to fondle. Soon she captivated his heart, whereupon

he offered her his hand. She took it dutifully, yet reluctantly, for her affection for him was filial, but her love belonged to another—her real match in youth and in romance. The middle-aged man, less fortunate than Barrie's Professor, felt soon enough that the gulf between his autumn and her summer was too wide, so—the gentle, chivalrous creature he was—he forsook his Dorado, and the home which Mark Embury built for her and for himself he handed over to a younger master.

II

A play like this is like the pretty yellow flower known as "noli me tangere." It is one of nature's sweet creations, and it requires gentle handling; it does not take kindly to too much inspection, and if you treat it urgently it will close up like an oyster. In other words, to enjoy *Mice and Men* you must allow the authoress to rock you into fairyland. She appeals to all that is youthful and imaginative in your nature; if you reason too closely and ask too much the spell is broken. The delicate woof of romance undefiled is the natural antithesis of critical vivisection. This admitted, the little play of Mrs. Ryley is wholly delightful, for its tone is healthful, its colouring pretty, and if it has a bad fault it is that the prettiness is at times rather long drawn out. But that is the luxury of an overflowing phantasy and easily corrected. Still, when applying the pruning knife the stage-manager should be careful. Mrs. Ryley knows her craft so well, her language is so comely in its freedom and finish, her wit is so neat and light of touch that curtailment might easily cut too deeply. And we want to keep the picture intact, for it is a lovely thing, an oasis in the desert of exaggerated realism and inanity. *Mice and Men* is, in fact, a good example of what a romantic play should be. It is neither too sweet nor too sentimental. It creates an

atmosphere of pure imagination without flying into the regions of the impossible or the bombastic. It strikes the right note of pathos and the right note of joy. The grown-up world will see it with as keen a pleasure as the younger generation. For there's a heart beneath the pretty belt, and its pathos is naturally relieved by honest, unforced laughter.

III

The charm of the play was enhanced by the charm of its heroine. Miss Gertrude Elliott has always touched a soft spot in our public by her winsomeness. The bloom of youth lies upon her, and we feel sorry when it is threatened by the cloud of gloom, as in *The Sacrament of Judas*. But Miss Gertrude Elliott has now done something more than bring her personality into play. True, her agreeable little mask with the big eyes that can assume so cunning an expression of an animated dolly had much to do with her success. The part fitted her like a glove. Yet she enlivened it with so much intelligence, with such wealth of gesture and piquancy of speech, that the attraction was irresistible. Nothing was mechanical, nothing forced, nothing done for effect. Miss Elliott, young by the grace of nature, turned her recollections of yesterday to the best account; we believed her statement of—age sixteen. She looked, she acted it, and we ourselves enjoyed it in temporary rejuvenescence. A pity that the lady who was chosen for the woman of the world in contrast to the girl was not happier in her conception. Miss Alice de Winton's ah-ing and aw-ing were anything but melodious. It is scarcely charitable to the ladies of last century to believe that all their emotions were expressed in hysterical syllables and high-pitched tones. Mr. Forbes Robertson had left the lion's share of the play to his wife. His part was

slightly negative, so that he had few opportunities to display the finest of his gifts. But he had one or two occasions to speak volumes in moments of silence, and then his gestures and his eyes revealed a world of unexpressed emotions. His wordless farewell at the gate, when he had dreamed his dream and returned to his home a lonesome man, was unforgettable. And he is a fine actor indeed who, without uttering a word, can stir his audience as did Mr. Robertson in this memorable scene.

HER MAJESTY'S : " ULYSSES "

A DRAMA IN A PROLOGUE AND THREE ACTS, BY
STEPHEN PHILLIPS

FEBRUARY 2, 1902

I

THE very thought of the wondrous Odyssey engenders splendour and grandeur. Mr. Stephen Phillips has preferred splendour in his alliance with a master of stagecraft. Outwardly *Ulysses* is perhaps the most gorgeous picture ever yet seen on the stage, yet inwardly the drama is not one of soul-stirring power, but a scintillation of fine words oftentimes crystallised into fine verse. It is not the easiest task to mete out full justice to Mr. Stephen Phillips, for immortal singers have told the tale to the childhood of a score of centuries. Others have followed, in the days when France's literature radiated in midday sunshine; finally, every educated man has at some time in his life dreamed of Ulysses on Calypso's magic isle. Our poet had, therefore, to face the perennial glory of the classics, the fascination of seventeenth-century romance, and the imagination of many a spectator's earlier dreams. But leaving all these considerations aside, and approaching the play as a new setting to an ancient tune, the first impression we gather from the poem of "Ulysses" is that Mr. Phillips, conscious of the destination of his work, accommodated himself to the exigencies of a

fanciful play-vitaliser instead of vouchsafing free rein to his "Pegasus." In the very prologue—which I deem unnecessary, for nothing happens except a little squabble among the "gods," which forcibly reminds one of the now notorious meetings of the Sociétaires of the Comédie Française with Mounet Sully as thunderer-in-chief—at the very beginning of the play there is this subserviency to splendour, and in every following tableau it is the same. Beauty of scenery, beauty of attire, beauty of women, beauty of grouping—all are suggested in the language of the poet. And that he was conscious of this is evidenced by the vacillation of his style, by the inequality of his verse. Now there is prose quite modern, now rhapsody of an exalted mould, now beautiful lyricism such as only a master of language can compass, now a touch of erotics fragrant with Parisian perfume. That the crowd will enjoy this strange medley, that it will applaud the poet in the setting and the picture in the frame, goes without saying, for, like Calypso's island, the stage is a wonderland, and the well-being of the eye often overpowers the discrimination of the ear.

II

There is so little pure poetry on our modern stage that it would be ungracious not to assign to Mr. Stephen Phillips's work the rank which is its due. If I criticise it is not to belittle, but to signify that Mr. Phillips is a solitary dweller on a lofty peak. "Herod" placed him there, and after "Herod," well-nigh great as it was, we were entitled to expect greater things. Nor do I believe that if the poet had taken his time, if he had been untrammelled in every respect, the magnificent subject of Ulysses would have inspired him in a lesser degree. But the difference between "Herod," an intrinsically uninspiring subject, and "Ulysses,"

whose experiences comprise the entire gamut of human emotions, is in one respect unmistakable. In "Herod" Mr. Phillips drew characters, nearly every one of whom, lifted out of the play, had a poetic vitality of their own. In "Ulysses" he draws pictures rich in colour, fine in detail, but so worked into the canvas that all idea of individuality is lost. In "Herod" there was action, life-blood, single-handed power. In "Ulysses" there is magnificence, picturesqueness, and luxurious recitation. I cannot imagine his Ulysses or his Calypso ever to have lived. I do not see them as entities, they merely translate to me the poet Phillips, a painter with words who explains a series of episodes, in each of which he is the *dramatis personæ* and the moving power. Only in the last act is there an approach to real drama. All that precedes is a fragmentary epic grandly adorned, in which the words, however beautiful, would scarce be missed if they were replaced by gesture and music. And this brings me to a general conclusion, which I express with some hesitation lest it be misunderstood: *Ulysses*, captivating to read, is not a drama in the accepted sense of the word. It is an unsurpassed libretto to a series of magnificent tableaux.

III

The production of *Ulysses* is without exception the "greatest show" on earth, for even the nether world is represented in it. But this colossal superstructure of scenery, music, dancing, and vociferation of mortals, immortals, and spectres upon the poetic language of Mr. Phillips destroys more than it begets, and hampers the actors. It is all very well to please the authorities of the British Museum, but above the national treasure house there stands the M^{use}. And plead as you will, the Muse and her satellites are nonplussed by the painter, the costumier, and that whole army of beauti-

fiers which is grouped around the engineer-in-chief. As a rule I leave criticism of scenery severely alone, but in this case it cannot be denied that the Cave of Calypso reminded one of Drury-Lane-Christmas-productions, and that Hades, mystic as it was, reached a degree of gruesomeness which transgressed the domains of poetic licence. Truly, if poetry is to be subjugated to the pantomimic, choregraphic and musical arts, then why not frankly abandon recitation and resort to opera? Jeane de Reszke as Ulysses, Calvé as Calypso, would have sung the drama into immortality!

The drift of all this is to defend the actors. The speaking of verse is a lost art in our country, the effort to revive it is praiseworthy. But to revive on one hand and to annihilate on the other is unsound policy. If this drama had been produced on a sober scale, if every man and woman had been drilled into the vocal and intellectual exigencies of rhythm, the performance would have been memorable. As it was, it excelled in spectacular beauty, but failed in poetic harmony. It was too overloaded, too noisy. Every one shouted, every one worked at high pressure, and those who, as the evening grew riper, tempered their ardour, scored off their companions. Thus Miss Lily Hanbury, blonde and beautiful, a Penelope lovable to the eye, who had moments of great power; thus Miss Constance Collier, in appearance more a Queen of Sheba than the goddess of wisdom and tact. To say that Miss Collier was an ideal Minerva would be idle flattery. Minerva is all distinction, Miss Collier is all robustness. But she spoke with conviction, and as her voice is powerful, her speech overwhelmed the surrounding clamour and went home to the topmost parts of the house. Mr. Tree in selecting the part of Ulysses undertook a thankless, and in one respect an unsuitable task. His strong point is trenchant argument, his weakest, exhibition of passion. Ulysses is a creature of much

passion and restricted argument. Hence great scenes went by without making much impression, and small scenes rose to unwonted importance. Mr. Tree is always interesting, if he is not always entrancing. As Ulysses he is interesting, but he stirs us not. The same applies to the Calypso of Miss Nancy Price. Hers was a burden to carry, for Calypso is of all women in mythology the most irresistible. Calypso is the siren of sirens, the enchantress unrivalled, the forerunner of Delilah, of Cleopatra—of all the charmers of history, new and old. Only a great actress of peculiar magnetism could do justice to so gigantic a part, and the fact that Miss Price has not failed, that she was agreeable to behold and to listen to, augurs well for her future, sanctions, in a measure, her selection.

There were many others in the lengthy cast who would deserve a word of praise or a few indications of criticism. But the hour is late, and there is but room left for a verdict. It is this. *Ulysses* is a *succès d'estime* in the most complimentary sense of the word. It will please the masses and kindle our interest in the future work of the poet and his valiant pioneer.

GARRICK THEATRE :

"PILKERTON'S PEERAGE"

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS, BY ANTHONY HOPE

FEBRUARY 2, 1902

I

MR. ANTHONY HOPE has wasted the chance of a lifetime. He chose a subject of infinite possibilities, and he selected for the evolution of it a period of exceptional opportunities, for all the world of fashion and their wives are anxiously watching the lucky-bag of Coronation honours. Mr. Hope, too, had another factor in his favour, in that every playgoer is clamouring for a good comedy, and that laurels of rare luxuriousness are treasured up for its author. Yet the chances and the period, the opportunities and the glory combined, were not enough to inspire the pen of our latest Aristophanes.

"*Pilkerton's Peerage*"! What a mine of mirth, of satire, of slings and arrows, of *bon mots* and *jeux d'esprit* there might lie under this title, which links the commonplace of a plebeian name with the coveted grandeur of blue blood freshly brewed. My mouth literally watered when I saw in my mind's eye the race of pill-compounders, provision merchants, tied-house proprietors, and City pomposities for the robes of a barony and the sign of a decoration cross. I foresaw a quaint network of subtle intrigues, woven by women

fair and feline, a good-natured conspiracy of men snobbish and smug, a whirl of adulation, adoration, flirtation, and smooth-tongued insinuation. Above all, I chuckled in anticipation of the dialogue that would tickle my ears. I thought of the daily political skits of Alfred Capus in the *Figaro*, of sallies that would drive a blush of self-consciousness to many cheeks, and would shake the theatre with laughter. For here was the great subject; the possibility of the funniest chapter in the human comedy of Vanity Fair.

II

Alas! how disappointing it all was. Instead of a well-sustained plot, there were snippets of all sorts—snippets of intrigue, of characterisation, of satire, of humour. But there was no entity. The central ideal, pretty well laid down in the first act, soon became diffuse. The comedy grew at times farcical, and crossed that border line which divides mirth from melodrama. Fun there was, but it was hothouse fun; it did not ripple and sparkle like the waters of a fountain, it came in fits and starts, as from a squirt—there was no continuity, and the elastic cord that should have held the story together gave way all the time instead of tightening. Thus our interest rose and sank, sank and rose, until, tired of wobbling, it gave way to lethargy, except when, here and there, a good line acted like a stimulant on the jaded mind. Now, why was this so? How did it come to pass that a witty man, a fluent writer, an imaginative mind, and a politician of some experience, failed to hit the target with almost every shot? I can but find the answer that Mr. Hope is not a dramatist born, and that the subject was too big for him. Although the first act in the Ministerial ante-chamber began well enough with pleasant gibes at the expense of Government officials

who prefer tomfoolery to work, and honours to honest achievements, the right track was soon lost. As soon as the Prime Minister appeared on the scene there was no longer satire, there was feeble caricature and impossible exaggeration. We may at times have had weak-kneed men in our Cabinets, but such dodderers and feather-brains as Minister Mangan are beyond the imagination of the wildest phantasy. The man talked like a child and behaved like an idiot. It ceased to be funny and became puerile. That was a cardinal fault, but the next was still worse.

Now, suppose I talk to you of a certain Pilkerton—good name!—who is after a peerage, what do you expect me to tell you about him? what kind of man do you see behind the name, if I mention his ambitions with a smile? Well, your reply is obvious—there is but one reply. You think of certain *nouveaux riches*, tradesmen for preference, who, having made their pile, now try to make their pedigree. You expect to hear of the man's snobbish ways, of his frantic efforts to scale Society's wall, of his munificence whenever royal schemes are ventilated by the Lord Mayor. You long to hear of funny incidents, of ludicrous slips of etiquette, of little rebuffs, of anecdotes galore. For Pilkerton must be the veriest idol of the satirist.

But this Pilkerton is nothing of the sort. All we know of his past is that he has successfully employed labour. All we learn of his present life is that he is a stick, is vainglorious in speech, and is neither fish, flesh, nor anything else, that his manners are abominable, that his character is brutal. He is, in fact, not at all a nice man, and certainly not a man who is in his right place in comedy. He bullies everybody who does not work for his peerage, and when he sees that the Minister's secretary is in love with his daughter, he actually practises *la bourse ou la vie* method on the poor fellow to the tune of no peerage, no daughter. Nor is the daughter quite a nice chip of the block. To

her the coronet seems to be of greater value than the heart; three times in the third act she hesitates between the man of her choice and her father's ambition for a title. Finally, love prompts surrender, but what is such love worth? And it is not good comedy either.

I might continue thus to analyse the play in order to prove why it is disappointing. But that would take us no further. The crucial point is this: Mr. Hope, whose facility as a writer of dialogue appeals to many, has applied to the stage that which in miniature cuts a pleasing figure in a newspaper and—if taken in small doses—in book form. But the stage demands something more than mere smart language and amiable small-talk: if the art of the drama meant no more than that, play-writing would be the gift of many. What the drama demands is the formulation of character, is the observation of life, not in hasty scrawls and thumbnail sketches, but worked into one consistent picture, in which the central idea, once it is explicitly ushered in, dominates the action. Mr. Hope has not yet learned how to cope with these difficult canons in the most difficult *genre* of the political comedy, and as a result his play, though occasionally amusing, presents a series of sketches, slightly connected, blurred and indistinct.

ADELPHI THEATRE : "ARIZONA"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY AUGUSTUS THOMAS

FEBRUARY 9, 1902.

I

SOMETIMES our public is a riddle to me. At all times the cup of patriotism is full to overflowing, and when the Briton abroad sees his flag, hears his National Anthem or the sound of his language, the tide of home-love rises mountain high.

How we all shouted and clapped and waved hands and handkerchiefs when our Irving and Ellen Terry reappeared in November in New York. The house shook with emotion, and the Americans, our hosts, enjoyed the demonstration; they caught fire, and unanimous vociferation reigned supreme. That is how the States treat British patriotism!

But when a detachment of American cousins comes over here, and their brethren foregather in joyful strength to give them a good cheer and a hearty send-off, some bilious malcontents seem to take umbrage at the exuberance of kinsmanship. And then, regardless of the common courtesy of hospitality, the merits of the play, and the efforts of the players, there is interruption and disapprobation ever ready to damp the ardour of our guests. It is in very bad taste indeed to behave so rudely to the stranger within our gates—the self-same

stranger who is ever ready to made a home in theatrical New York for our geese and our swans.

This little sermon has, of course, nothing to do with the production of *Arizona*, but its delivery seems to me to be in the right place, since really the first night at the Adelphi was anything but flattering to our *amour propre*, and distinctly unfair to the newcomers. For to shout, to howl, to clamour ironically for the author when a work of distinct merits has been meritoriously performed by a competent company, is to exhibit an animus entirely uncalled for, even if patriotism leaped beyond discretion. After all, in our days of cold-blooded materialism, the outburst of a hearty old-fashioned emotion is a healthy antidote to the affectation of *nil mirari* and supercilious reserve.

II

It is on account of this very hearty, old-fashioned expression of emotion that *Arizona* is a good melodrama, eminently fit to usher in the renascence of the Adelphi Theatre. Melodrama is, as far as England is concerned, well-nigh dead; the ideas of the writers seem effete, and for want of imagination they must needs drag in fire-engines, tanks, balloons, avalanches, and such cheap sensations as the biograph shows us much more graphically for one penny. But Mr. Augustus Thomas, of *Alabama*, in which Willard reaped fame if not fortune, is a melodramatist of the sound and imaginative school of yesterday. To him not the mechanism but the play is the thing; he needs no colossal apparatus to grip us; he does not require ten scenes and ten sumptuous luxuries of canvas. He has a story to unfold, and in telling it he goes straight ahead in four well-rounded, well-timbered, poignant acts. He also introduces local colour with deftness, although since that lovely play *Sue*, by Pemberton and

Bret Harte, no one has ever pictured the backlands of America with such vividness, such fineness of touch. *Arizona* does not—as far as I am concerned—represent a particular State of America; what happens might have happened as well in Mexico, in Canada, on the veldt in Boerland, wherever there is farming, horse-breeding, and a civilisation still uncouth. But that does not mar the story—the thrilling story of how a lieutenant suffered the greatest sacrifice of all, the death-blow to his blameless honour, in order to save the wife of his colonel, the sister of his sweetheart, who was on the brink of betraying her marital faith. That conflict is intensely stirring, because the trinity of honour, faith, and love, impresses all men, high and low; because a story in which a woman's fate and a man's self-respect are concerned, if skilfully handled, ever holds our interest, although the issue may be palpable and imagination sometimes elopes with logic. The great merit of Mr. Thomas' play is that it never flags, that constantly fresh fuel is laid upon the flaming fire of excitement, that the dialogue is free from bombast and studded with touches of human nature and humour. True, we in England cannot always understand the peculiar flashes of American *esprit*, nor can we always follow the twist of language so peculiar to our glib-tongued and quick-witted cousins, and henceforth American managers will be well advised to adapt lines and idioms to the comprehension of our public. But these are minor points of criticism. The chief conclusion to arrive at is whether *Arizona* is a good specimen of melodrama, and I for one have no hesitation in calling it a model, whereunto I attach the rider: English melodramatists, please copy.

GLOBE THEATRE :
"THE HEEL OF ACHILLES"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS AND A PROLOGUE, BY LOUIS N.
PARKER AND BOYLE LAWRENCE

FEBRUARY 9, 1902

I

VICTORIEN SARDOU, the famous dramatist of France, has fathered quite a tribe of the sincerest form of flatterers. And this tribe may fitly be divided into two classes, the sardelles and the sardines. The former, somewhat rare and often exquisite in taste, are mostly, like the great Sardou, French produce; the sardines, more common and very variable in quality, are so plentiful in English waters that a little exportation would prove a godsend.

For while the sardelles have learned everything from the master, not merely his craftiness and his trickery, but some of his felicity of style and his spontaneous humour, the sardines are quite content to imitate his hankering after sensational effects, regardless of verisimilitude or even probabilities. They forget that Sardou is a master-mind; that his exposure of Countess Zicka in *Diplomacy*, his hair-pin scene in *Theodora*, his terrible torture episode in *La Tosca*, are contrived by means which may tumble to pieces under vivisection, yet are clever enough to grip and to hold the open mind of a theatrical audience. It was not for

nothing in his hey-day, say between 1874 and 1887, Victorien Sardou was called the Magician of Marly. For he was a magician, inasmuch as he knew so well how to practise his *tours de force* that detection was never immediate—that it required, in fact, a new generation of writers and critics to unmask his artifice.

And here is the vital difference. Our sardines are so guileless or so convinced of the public's stupidity that they take no precautions whatsoever. They somehow evolve a plot, or, even more frequently, they imagine a scene promising goose-flesh and thrills, and houp-la! a play is built around the happy thought with a swiftness that would make a jerry-builder blush.

When such a play is ready, it is just a toss-up whether the public will swallow it. But since our public, like the boa-constrictor, is greedy but not discriminating, the thing often goes down with a gulp, and mental indigestion is not necessarily the unpleasant sequel.

II

After this characterisation on broad lines of what spurious Sardou plays are like, it is easy to deal with *The Heel of Achilles*, the joint effort of our most prolific playwright and a dramatic critic. It is not an auspicious collaboration, at any rate so far as Mr. Parker is concerned. Hitherto, Mr. Parker has been known as a graceful writer of somewhat invertebrate plays. The infusion of new blood, purely journalistic, has roughened Mr. Parker's style without strengthening his method. Truly, even the best friend and partisan of both authors could not honestly belaud this outcome of their joint activity. It belongs essentially to the *genus impossibile*, and, since England is dangerous ground for impossible plots, the action is transferred to Russia, the gigantic empire which, in the eyes of our play-

wrights, is a land so unknown to us that every enormity and every atrocity can safely be laid at its doors. Russia shares, in fact, with Japan, the dubious honour of being the most slandered country on earth! But, somehow, our first-nighters begin to cast suspicious eyes on these incredible tales of Russian barbarity, and it was wise discretion on the part of our authors that they declined with silent thanks the honour of an ovation. For the gods were irritated; and, although they cheered the actors, they had had enough of four acts of plotting, and one act in which would-be British diplomacy was held up to ridicule and contempt. After all, the story of a Russian prince who covets an English girl is not very novel, nor is it astounding that to gain his ends he should threaten fire, brimstone, and Siberia if the girl were not ready to sacrifice her *fiancé*. But there is a mild interest in it, as in all plots which deal with one woman and two men. All depends on how the story is developed and finally unravelled, and it is here that the authors tread on dangerous ground. They invent a conspiracy to deliver India into Russian hands; they invent a fateful telegram abstracted by a young ne'er-do-well from a Russian statesman's study; they invent a British amateur diplomatist, as gullible as a gull, and his secretary of towering stupidity; they invent a kind of Russian justice which condemns a foreigner of distinction without form and without fear of the British lion. They invent all this for one purpose only—a repetition of the famous torture scene in *La Tosca*. In the room adjacent to the saloon is the would-be diplomatist, who hopes to save his (unim-perilled) country by disclosing the telegram. That room is, of course, locked on all sides, thanks to the precautions of the Chief of Police—by the way, the father of a girl who has been wronged by his master. In the saloon are the English girl and the Russian prince, Chancellor of H.I.M. the Czar! You see the game: Either you give him up and marry me, or he

goes to the Ural. Do you hear the screw on Caravadossi's brow, and the cold-blooded command of Scarpia: *Insistez?* Well, here there is only the moral screw, but it works nearly as well, and in the end (of the act) the Prince may cry "Winner!" However, we are not wont to go home upon the triumph of wickedness, so there is one act more. Nemesis (to say nothing of a ukase depriving the Prince of all his worldly honours and chattels), impersonated by the betrayed girl and a poison phial, makes short work of the malefactor, while, outside, the church bells announce that there will be a marriage to-morrow. All of which is frightfully thrilling.

III

The cardinal faults of this play are, of course, beyond redemption. A drama which is founded on absurdities is as unsound as a house built without piles upon the marshy soil of Amsterdam. But something can be done to save the building from immediate collapse, and that is to pump away the superfluous and dangerous ditch-water. In other words, let the scythe—not a mere pruning-knife—be used to mow away the useless dialogue and the sensational speeches; that will tighten the action, intensify the several strong scenes which are now drowned in words. For this is a consolation I can offer to our authors after so much criticism, that both seem to have exceptional dexterity in the contrivance of situations. Mr. Parker has proved it in many a play, Mr. Lawrence has indicated it in his melodrama which was produced at the Imperial Theatre. But scenes alone do not make good plays, and before building scenes it is essential to devise a basis and a framework wherein the scenes may be aptly fitted.

It has already been said that the actors were cheered, and they deserved it. Mr. Fred Terry, Mr. Valentine, and Miss Edyth Olive carried the chief honours.

Mr. Terry's prince and plotter was an imaginative, a powerful piece of work. It revealed creative power. It was picturesque, mystic, strange. He exercised much restraint, and that soberness told. Mr. Valentine, on the other hand, was vehement as the Chief of the Police, thirsting to avenge the honour of his daughter, and for once these constant outbursts seemed neither unnatural nor beyond the picture. Miss Olive, an actress of many gifts, contrasted Mr. Valentine's vehemence with deep-felt intensity. Hers was perhaps the finest, the most human, performance of all. I have great difficulty in dealing with Miss Julia Neilson. I may be wrong, but to me it would seem that Miss Neilson is gradually allowing her own method and personality to be overwhelmed by Mrs. Patrick Campbell. When I behold her peculiar coiffure I think of Mrs. Campbell; when I see her move I think of the motion of Mrs. Campbell; when I listen to her intonations tending towards the guttural, I hear the echo of Mrs. Campbell's voice; in Miss Neilson's facial expression, her poses, her movements, her inertness, her gesticulations, it is Mrs. Campbell ever and ever called back to my mental eye. It may all be fortuitous, it may all be my want of discrimination, but there it is, and I cannot get away from it, cannot enjoy the performance to the full, for after all the spirit of Miss Neilson is not the spirit of Mrs. Patrick Campbell. If I could only rid myself of the vision, I would say that Miss Neilson had moments of great power, one moment in the third act approaching greatness. But constant comparison interfered with my admiration, and in that uncomfortable dilemma the scales were ever in tremor, and my judgment sought the balance in vain.

COMEDY THEATRE : "MEMORY'S GARDEN "

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS BY ALBERT CHEVALIER AND
T. GALLON

FEBRUARY 23, 1902

BABIES and pistols are dangerous stage properties. When the pistols go off they shock the better half of the public, when they don't they provoke hilarity and break the histrionic spell. Babies, when they come on, often provoke derision, and when they are unseen factors of the play they are talked about not wisely but too much.

In "Memory's Garden," which is a babies' play not for babies, the dear little one plays off the stage, yet it is on all the time. It is, in fact, an *enfant terrible* that gives its authors away right from the start. For you need be neither a clairvoyant nor a thought-reader to foreshadow coming events when half a dozen sentences in the first scene of the first act acquaint you with all there is in the bag of tricks. Once you are told that the neighbours are gossiping about a husbandless mother and a fatherless babe ; that a menial is willing to be both father and bridegroom ; and that the vicar's son is due home on Christmas eve after eight months' sport in Africa ; our imagination does the rest. We know "Who's who" ; we also soon guess "what's what," the latter implying that the young sinner must make amends by ultimately marrying the mother of his

child, while the playmate in his own station of life whom he had wooed and won, will belong to another. It is in literal accordance with the maxim of Uncle Sarcey that the drama is the art of preparation. But this play of careful manufacture and no spontaneity of thought proves that maxims, like scriptural words, must be digested with some discrimination. It is all very well to initiate your audience, to furnish them, as it were, with a clue to the conflict that is to rivet their attention during three acts, but the authors must be careful not to say too much at the beginning, lest there remains nothing to be said afterwards. True, Messrs. Gallon and Chevalier, after the act of exposition, keep one card up their sleeve. When the parson's son is disinclined to own up and behave as heroes ought to do in British plays (and elsewhere), the grey-haired father gravely informs him that his mother is not his mother, which Celtic statement perplexes both the sinner and the audience. If the old man had said, "Your father is not your father," the case would have been somewhat hackneyed, yet intrinsically interesting. But the statement that one's mother is not one's mother is incredible, yet on second thoughts it appears quite commonplace, since men have been known to disregard Mr. Punch's "Don't" more than once. Having recovered from the suddenness of the conundrum, we learn that the old parson too had tasted the forbidden fruit in memory's garden, and that his present good wife had redeemed *his* youthful indiscretion. It is not a very edifying story withal, although the authors have tried to hide its unpleasantness under a profusion of words, much sentimentality, and, here and there, a semi-quotations of Biblical phraseology.

But all that would not matter if the development of the narrative were interesting, if the would-be effective situations were thrilling, if there were real feeling in the acidulated sugar-water of the dialogue. For there were great opportunities. The scene between the two

men—the seducer and the self-sacrificing rescuer ; the scene between the girl and her lover ; the scene between father and son ; the scene between the (so-called) hero and the girl friend of his youth. Of all these only one succeeded in rousing the audience, and that was because Mr. Macintosh, fine actor that he is, in the character of the parson, sprang into the breach, and defended with all his might the rickety stronghold, flooded by the inimical waters of superfluous dialogue. All the rest was swamped in wordiness, clumsiness of manipulation, and partly in ineffective acting. For Mr. Alfred Kendrick, strenuously as he works as the parson's son, is all effort and no conviction ; is what one calls in theatrical parlance “hard,” and never unconscious of his theatrical surroundings. Others, like Mr. Bassett Roe and Miss Daisy Thimm, a very bright young *ingénue*, whose eyes are so vivacious that they often wander beyond the footlights, struggled bravely with the volumes of words which they had to pour forth. Mr. Bassett Roe, in particular, deserves our commendation and sympathy in that he made something vital of a country lad, who spoke with a grace of speech altogether foreign to green fields and blue blouses. A *débutante*, Miss Norah Lancaster, indicated powers of a budding dramatic actress. She was the forsaken girl, and had at the end of the first act to act in silence the recognition of her lover. Miss Lancaster did that with great skill. Her figure was inert, but her features and eyes were full of emotion, and flung wordless denunciation at the head of her lover. Later on, when her reproaches found words, she over-emphasised a little, was too melodramatic—an exuberance of her novitiate which is more easy to cure than its contrast, so general nowadays. On the whole, it was a most auspicious beginning of a new career. It would have been pleasant to offer the same congratulations to Mr. Robert Newman, who, having conquered Melpomene, is now a suitor of her sister Thalia. But,

with all good intentions on the critic's part, it cannot be gainsaid that the first selection was unfortunate.

"Memory's Garden" is the work of unpractised hands, and difficult as it is to judge from the mere perusal of a manuscript, its shortcomings are so glaring, that any expert could have forestalled the inevitable result.

PRINCE OF WALES'S THEATRE :

"A COUNTRY MOUSE"

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS, BY ARTHUR LAW

MARCH 2, 1902

"IT takes a country mouse to catch a man about town." Here is a new proverb which Mr. Arthur Law has developed into a play. And he has done it very cleverly, for he is a man of 'cute ideas. Remember how we laughed, public and critics alike, at *The New Boy!* He knows his trade and most of its tricks. He has seen and read all the French farces "with doors," from *Pink Dominoes* to the latest Valabrègue. He also read, so I am told, for I scarcely know the book, "The Visits of Elizabeth." And Mr. Law has read and seen and digested, with profit to himself, and for the benefit of his neighbours. He can twist a good idea into a funny farce, a gift which many imagine they possess, but one to which but a selected few own the title. And so he invents, compiles, develops, seasons, a comic story, all too fanciful to be true, yet just possible enough, just sufficiently fringing upon truth and modern society to amuse an after-dinner audience.

Moreover, Mr. Law commands that amount of wit which suits a public accustomed to musical comedy and its allusions, equivocal and otherwise. Of course, that wit is not absolutely British. It is neither of Gilber-

tian pungency nor of Pineroesque dulcet acidity. It is more or less Anglo-French, the sort of thing smuggled in small and dainty morsels so long as the absence of a Channel tunnel prevents wholesale importation. But wit it is, and as that article is at a prohibitive premium among our playwrights just now (save your penny Pilkerton!) we close an eye and do not examine its moral tone too keenly. I say all this in palliation of a little play in which there is much flirtation with divorce, and here and there a *soupçon* of real naughtiness, because it is an original product, and it behoves us to protect home industries. Else—well, if Mr. Law had been an adapter instead of a home-grown author, I should have taken him to task for introducing us to a couple of married ladies ready to elope with a brace of flighty bachelors—a thing quite foreign (excellent adjective that—it means so much) to our morals.

But in spite of the spirit in which I write about an animated little play that has amused the audience, not quite honestly perhaps, yet has amused it, I cannot refrain from chiding Mr. Law for spoiling his game before the candle was blown out. He wrote a “*finis*,” forgetting the *coronat opus*, in other words, he brought the curtain down on a situation all awry. What we wanted—what we had a right to expect as a kind of condonation for the peccadilloes preceding—was that the little country mouse should catch the right man of the right age. That would have covered a multitude of wild oats. But to marry off the dear little thing of eighteen to an old duke, that was—I will not put it too strongly—unpleasant. At any rate, we resented it, and so, while until the very last scene there was every prospect of a cordial “author! author!!” the curtain finally descended on an ambiguous verdict of lukewarm applause and unenthusiastic dispersion. Wherefore my opinion is: Remodel the last scene at once, mate youth to youth, and

let the old duke offer his sere and yellow leaves in quarters where they are more appreciated and less unpalatable.

A farcical comedy of this nature requires acting at high pressure. The repartees must fly across the stage like arrows. The least halting, the least uncertainty of memory, the slightest slowness of tongue and manner slackens the gaiety of the audience. And there was far too much deliberation in the utterings and doings of the actors at the first performance. Nearly everybody declaimed, treated the affair *au sérieux*, and seemed conscious of the fact that one was funny, and had to say funny things. Mr. Du Maurier, always safe, but neither nimble nor vivacious; Miss Vane Featherston, grandiose in movement and heavy of weight in delivery; Mr. Somerset (whose gait in the first act was hyper-senile), distinguished, but too grave and sententious—they all erred in the direction of solemnity, when lightness of touch was demanded. Only Miss Granville, when she had mastered nervousness and text; Mr. Beveridge, in a part of quiet indications and no development; and Mrs. Brooke, delightful as a funny old housekeeper, caught quite the right tone. They were in the picture, and one regretted the paucity of their opportunities. Miss Annie Hughes in the leading part—the country mouse—was, as she always is, clever, arch, reliable to a fault, but she was altogether too “knowing.” Her conception of the part, her allusions to “I am from the country,” expressed with a merry twinkle as if she would say “I am not so guileless as I seem to be,” were misleading. We believed her all along to be secretly married to somebody—for her innocence was too cunning to be genuine—and when we found out, soon enough, yet too late, that she was indeed but a simple country maiden, we felt disappointed. The part ought to have been played in the vein of an *ingénue* without afterthought, while Miss

Hughes played it with all the feline *savoir-faire* of a world-wise society girl.

All said, *A Country Mouse* forms by no means a bad evening's entertainment. It is studded with amusing moments, and when the final scene is remodelled there will be much laughter from first to last.

ST. JAMES'S THEATRE : "PAOLO AND FRANCESCA "

A TRAGEDY IN FOUR ACTS, BY STEPHEN PHILLIPS

MARCH 9, 1902

I

It was a momentous evening and a great ordeal for the poet. For ever since his drama saw the light in book form the bugles of fame had been sounding in ecstatic harmony. Stephen Phillips the poet was named in the same breath with Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Dante ! And now the hour had struck when the touchstone was to be applied, when proof had to be given that the play was not merely a drama of the library, but one that would successfully cross the barrier of the footlights and fulfil its promise of strengthening the laborious renaissance of our poetic drama. Had that proof failed we should have gone away in sorrow, yet in gratitude. For he who writes poetic plays deserves praise for his unselfish devotion to dramatic art in its most difficult form. But he who ventures lavish expense on such efforts at a period when the public mind leans towards frivolity is almost worthy of greater praise. His action in the face of the commercial tendencies of our stage amounts to sacrifice, to heroism. Thus a spirit of well-wishing, of heartfelt co-operation, pervaded the house. If those on the stage strove for victory, the crowd in the packed auditorium most heartily wished them to

win. Our public is, after all, not so inartistic as its reputation; it is ready to encourage the noble and the beautiful; all it asks is to be given an opportunity for real admiration. And that opportunity has been vouchsafed in *Paolo and Francesca*. One felt all along that those responsible for the production had worked in loving collaboration. The manager, the actors, the scene-painter, and the designer of the costumes—they had all stood loyally by the poet. His triumph was their heart's desire, and so for the nonce the lines were fairly spoken with *panache* and in poetic cadence, the colours were chosen with discretion, the scenes were beautiful to behold, but there was no overloading, and above his henchmen towered the poet.

II

Let me interpolate here a brief remark of a personal nature. I had never read the poem in its book form. I had heard a fragment recited here and there, but for four years the leaves of my volume had remained uncut. I knew that this work was destined for the stage, and from the stage I wished to make its acquaintance. It was a time of painful waiting, but it met with its reward. My mind was quite unbiased; all I heard was new to me, all I saw disclosed an unknown land of singular fascination. No memories haunted me; the fine lines rushed towards me with the suddenness of a revelation; the beautiful love scene at the end of the third act enchanted me like the chords of a youthful lyre. And I did not think of Shakespeare, of all the great luminaries to whom Phillips had been compared. Phillips alone spoke to me, and in his verse I heard again and again the proud originality of a lofty mind—the *Io sono io* of a poet who admires his peers and his superiors, but whose voice is all his own.

Were I asked to classify *Paolo and Francesca* I should

say that it was a great poem and an artistic play. You feel the qualification. I am more smitten by the words than by the structure, by the thoughts than by the action. For there is unevenness in the drama; there is profusion of lines and poverty of progress in the first act, there is humour in the second and third which is of lesser quality, and could be discarded without detriment; there is one cardinal fault—perhaps intensified by the acting—that neither Paolo nor Francesca, but that Giovanni Malatesta is the central, the dominating figure of the play, while Lucrezia, too, if she had been played by a true tragedienne, would have claimed a large share of our interest. But these minor shortcomings are amply counterbalanced by three scenes of splendid drama. The union of hearts between Paolo and Francesca is perhaps one of the finest romantic episodes of modern creation. The picture of the garden full of roses, blushing and pale, faintly lighted by the purple streaks of daybreak, is in itself pictorially beautiful. But its beauty is enhanced by the amorous whispers of the lovers who are sinning yet sinless in their youthful ardour. Here the poet reveals his genius, for he deprives an episode fraught with danger of all ulterior thoughts. The next scene of singular beauty was when Francesca implored Lucrezia to be her shield and her protector. It is worked up with great dexterity, and when finally the embittered, barren, lonesome woman, in her craving for maternity, winds a loving arm round the child, we feel that the tenderest chord is struck. Then, indeed, we think of Shakespeare and of that sublime touch which makes all human hearts beat in unison. The end, too, is beautiful. When the lovers are slain; when all are mourning, even he, whose hand had severed the thread of their young lives; when the blind old servant, silent and horror-struck, feels that her prediction has come true, the tragedy reaches, scenically and ethically, its splendid climax. The curtain falls upon a scene of

pity and remorse, softened by the symbolic thought that those who were not allowed to love and live are united in death.

III

The impression left by this performance is strengthened by a perusal of the book. Nominally, indeed, Paolo and Francesca are the heroes of the play, but Malatesta and Lucrezia are the characters which the poet has developed with the greatest elaboration. Compared with their robust outlines, the figures of Paolo and Francesca are mere silhouettes. They appeal to us more by imagination than by fact. They float, as it were, through the action. They are ethereal rather than materialised. Consequently they lay no very heavy burden on the actors, provided that their personalities are aptly chosen. And both Miss Evelyn Millard and Mr. Henry Ainley were well fitted to their parts. Miss Millard looked divinely picturesque in her Florentine wig crowned with roses, and she was fairly successful in being girlish and unworldly. Her performance was amiable, if nothing more. Mr. Ainley, the true Bensonian that he is, recited with fine rhythm and a verve quite consistent with the adolescence of Paolo. But his method is still immature, and the many pauses he made after nearly every line discounted something of the general effect. As a result, the second act—though ending with a splendid soliloquy—missed fire, and elicited far less enthusiasm than it deserved. The Lucrezia of Miss Elizabeth Robins was disappointing. It was all effort and no intensity, all vociferation and no emotion. The embittered nature of the character degenerated into snarling, the touches of real passion into accents of something dangerously akin to bathos. For a part like this an actress is required who has intuitive feeling, whose heart is mightier than her brain—in fact,

a real *tragédienne*, many of whom have succeeded because they (or, I should rather say, in spite of the fact that they) felt more than they thought. Giovanni Malatesta found a splendid impersonator in Mr. George Alexander. That he was at times somewhat Irvingesque is no reproach, for Irving is ever picturesque and distinguished. But what I admired in Mr. Alexander was his splendid vigour, the clearness of his enunciation, the sympathy which he commanded for a personage unlovable in aspect and by nature. The costume of past ages befits Mr. Alexander well, and when he leaves his frock-coat to don the harness, he becomes, not merely outwardly, a different man. Much praise, too, should be given to those in smaller parts—to Miss Ada Ferrar as the weirdly impressive blind servant; to Miss Braithwaite as the comely maid of Francesca; to Miss Margaret Halstan, who, in the third act, played an intrinsically indifferent scene of humour with freedom and agreeable assurance; to Mr. Lyall Swete and Mr. Lemprière Pringle, fine soldiers both, with sounding voices and breezy manners.

Whether it was wise to leaven the text of the play so copiously with the imaginative and, at times, highly dramatic music of Mr. Percy Pitt, is a debatable question. I for one prefer to enjoy the poet's words with no accompaniment, and the constant musical illustrations—I would fain say interruptions—detract from the attention, which should solely be given to the action and the spoken word. But incidental music has become a fashionable invader, and, perhaps, like all innovations of passing popularity, it will have its day and then die for want of lasting appreciation.

When at length the play was over, the enthusiasm, manifest all the evening, broke out into a great ovation to every one concerned, but above all to Mr. Stephen Phillips and to Mr. George Alexander. It was a rare

delight to witness so stirring a scene, which meant something more than reverence for a work of art and admiration for its producer. For in that applause we hailed the happy tidings that there is yet a future for the poetic drama in the land of Shakespeare.

THE DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE : "THE PRINCESS'S NOSE"

COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS, BY HENRY ARTHUR JONES

MARCH 16, 1902

I

THAT talented dramatist, Mr. Henry Arthur Jones, has at least one of the qualifications of genius. He is absolutely unreliable. To-day he will produce a play which takes the town by storm, scores centuries of evenings, and brings him fame and fortune. But on the morrow his work may temporarily wipe out all these glorious antecedents and suffer a fiasco of undoubted intensity. Stranger than that ! Plays of Mr. Jones have been known to fail on the first night, and to rise a few days after when acted in a totally different key. Such was the case when *The Manœuvres of Jane* failed as a comedy and succeeded as an uproarious farce ; and when, last Thursday, *The Princess's Nose* proved as luckless as its title, I am not the only one who wondered how, in a week or two, the play would fare if it were played *à la diable* in mock solemnity and the wild whirl of irrepressible buffoonery. For *The Princess's Nose*, as we saw it on the first night, is neither a serious play nor does it do justice to its appellation of comedy. It is the sort of nondescript thing which in common parlance is known as neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring.

The play begins, indeed, with a mighty to-do of grave marital complications. The Prince leads the Princess by the nose, and as an indication of what is likely to happen there is much needless dialogue in the first act around a certain fancy dress hat, which is best described as a Welsh turret adorned with two big horns. The Princess is naturally disinclined to disgrace her pretty face with such an historical abomination, and from all she says we understand that the ugly headgear has an inner meaning, and that its significance is pointed by Mrs. Malpas, a "poor" brewer's wife, with whom her princely lord is—well, flirting. It was all the more unkind of the Prince to behave so unkindly to his English wife, since she had just presented him with a son and heir, with whose arrival the origin of the intrigue is coincident. Nor is she willing to let him elope with the fair charmer. She tells him, after the manner of "Francillon," that if he persists in his wickedness he may be treated to a dose of gander-sauce—an argument which fails to impress this Serene Highness. Francillon's device having been more or less exhausted, the Princess and Mr. Jones are in a fix how to proceed when, happy thought!—they remember another lady who understands the gentle art of coaxing husbands into fidelity, Miss Kitty Grey. The case is now no longer merely one of the Princess's nose, for her Highness at the hour appointed for the elopement appears in lovely frills and tries to lure the wayward consort to supper in the cosiness of her boudoir. All this is very tragic, a trifle improper, and so managed that there is a slight excuse for his Highness to regret the alliance of his coronet with a bourgeois maiden. We really begin to wonder where the comedy comes in, for, except a few snippets of bright dialogue between the family doctor and a gossiping old lady, a faint squib against æstheticism and Bedford Park, a few jests of reverent age and irreverent tendencies, there has been nothing comic. But then, in the fourth act, fate and a

motor-car come to the rescue. Mrs. Malpas' would-be elopement is checked by a collision and a badly damaged nose—a much more unromantic nose than that of the Princess, which was red in her youth. The Prince comes home crestfallen and repentant, and the superfine young man whom Francillon designated as a possible lover is turned out with a horse-whipping for his amorous pains. After which the Prince promises to be good—for how long Mr. Jones alone knows, for the cure was more drastic than logically effective.

I have explained here these few threads of the story because it is the only possible criticism on a play of singular fatuity. Maybe Mr. Jones will tell us, as I believe he indicated after *The Manœuvres of Jane*, that the actors had not grasped his meaning. But that is no concern of the world. We were promised a comedy, and what we saw was three acts of indifferent serious drama, and one act of comedy dragged in by the hair. There was in the second act one scene of good drama (and bad manners) between the two women, after which we expected a real climax, but we were sorely disappointed. The play gossiped along like a picaninny which prattles a lot and says little. There was no interest in the plot; no interest in the characters; no interest in the dialogue. The thing hung fire, and it was a relief to patience when it was snuffed out.

II

Before leaving the play for the pleasanter task of dealing with the actors, a general remark as to Mr. Jones's would-be Society plays, and to *The Princess's Nose* in particular, seems not out of place. It is this, that while all his characters move in circles which are supposed to be the example of good breeding, the manners of that society are such as would be tolerated nowhere except in fiction. It is exceedingly difficult

to specify and to justify such a remark. There are certain atmospheric things in a man's work which one cannot explain in so many words, yet which are absolutely palpable when one perceives them with ear and eye. The Society people of Mr. Jones often speak and behave in a manner which is quite the reverse of decorous. To find their equal one should, in default of the manuscript at hand, remember the sallies of *Punch* at the expense of *parvenus*, *nouveaux riches*, Mrs. Malaprop, and generally all those good folks who say things which had better remain unsaid, or things which one would rather have expressed differently. The manner in which the Prince addresses and treats his wife is altogether ungentlemanly, not to say boorish. Even *rastaquouères* (was the Prince one?—his pedigree remains undisclosed) do not err in this direction. The way in which the Princess literally kicks her rival out of doors is unworthy of a lady—even of a lady who has been wronged in her tenderest feelings. Tact and restraint are after all the two cardinal features by which men and women of refinement stand exalted above those of inferior breeding. Again, the guests of the Prince behave with an impudent freedom, an air of familiarity altogether in contrast to the habits of "Society." And when in the last act a somewhat indiscreet youth is accompanied to his carriage by a sound horse-whipping (which would be amply deserved by mine host) we feel inclined to marvel that a writer of Mr. Jones's sagacity should thus confound the roughness of our forefathers with the etiquette of to-day. I express no regret for dealing with this subject with such candour. It has been observed, and commented upon by many in private, and its incorporation into a criticism of the play implies in no wise a spirit derogatory to the author, but simply points out a defect which greatly affects the vitality of his works.

III

The actors were admirable, one and all ; especially Mr. H. B. Irving, Miss Irene Vanbrugh, Mr. Cosmo Stuart, and Miss Gertrude Kingston, in the difficult part of Mrs. Malpas, while Miss Carlotta Addison, often associated with the characters of invertebrate matrons, now gave us a caustic and clever sketch of a garrulous old lady, exceedingly malicious and of splendid *mauvais genre*. Mr. H. B. Irving had perhaps the most ungrateful part to play. This Prince with an accent, this kinsman of a certain King, now deceased, but notorious in his time from Biarritz to Belgrade, was within an ace of being ridiculous. The accent alone was ludicrous, the man himself was ridiculously contemptible. Yet we did not laugh at Mr. Irving, for he applied the veneer of his talent to the drab colour of the character. In the shell he was so much a gentleman that he nearly succeeded in concealing the core. Miss Vanbrugh was charming in her lighter moments, and from her silent sorrow the play derived its few moments of real pathos. But Miss Vanbrugh must beware of one of her friends and admirers. She must not imitate the great Sarah in her "tigering." When the Princess, in her great anguish, exclaimed, "I will ! I will ! I will !" (deceive him) we heard the roaring of Sarah. And Miss Vanbrugh, incarnation of sweet womanliness, is scarcely herself in the expression of excessive violence. Mr. Cosmo Stuart, heavily saddled with the unsympathetic part of male namby-pambyism, was very successful in restraining the unpleasantness of the character. Mr. Lennox Pawle, on the other hand, with his one sentence of adoration for his wife, made a great deal of his small part. He has a great future, and is already nearly as popular in West London as he was, but a short time ago, in the district below Aldgate Pump.

A generally cheerless evening ended in a manner quite unwonted to our audiences, who are, as a rule, so positively or so negatively enthusiastic. When the curtain fell the actors were acclaimed as they deserved, but beyond a single voice there was no call for the author. The house dispersed in solemn quietude. True, the play had failed, but the splendid record of the author entitled him to respect. The audience, remembering the first night of *Arizona*, gave an open verdict. They left to the critics the thankless task of explaining the cause of their silence.

ST. GEORGE'S HALL: "EVERYMAN"

A MORALITY PLAY

MARCH 23, 1902

THANKS to the efforts of Mr. William Poel, the leading spirit of the Elizabethan Stage Society, and Mr. Ben Greet, we have now an "Oberammergau" in London. I wonder how many have heard of it, for no drum has been beaten and no preliminary paragraphs have foretold things amazing and wonderful. With unobtrusive zeal Mr. Poel's society does its work, and Mr. Ben Greet—Mr. Benson's rival in the careful training of young actors—has said not a word to prepare us for the triumph of Miss Wynne Matthison. Yet triumph is the right word for a performance so beautiful, so melodious in diction, so warmly and truly felt that I regard it as being the most evenly harmonious accomplishment of elocution I have ever heard upon our stage. On a March afternoon, in a hall chilled with draughts, an audience sat for an hour and a half spellbound; silenced were the coughers and the sniffers and the tattlers whenever that lovable voice of Miss Matthison chanted the unknown poet's words—words of stateliness and simplicity, words from the heart tuned to the lyre, words of religion beyond the distinction of creed and acceptable to all. At times the solemnity of the action, wedded to the soft imploration of the repentant sinner, was so deeply charged with pathos that one's whole being was shaken, eyes were

dimmed, and the throat felt narrowed in the clutch of emotion. No sermon on the futility of all that is human could be more convincing; no preacher's voice could move us more intensely than the unaffected sincerity of Miss Wynne Matthison. It was heartrending and it was beautiful. And there were others who had understood the exaltation of the theme; the artist who enacted Death—I ignore most names, for the programme quotes them not—rendered a character beset by all kinds of dangers with quiet dignity and originality; and the lady who played Knowledge—I recognised her as Miss Tita Brand, who only recently scored success in *Kabale und Liebe*—was conspicuous by the fine distinction of her diction, the impressive power of her voice. Others, all well meaning and earnest to a fault, were perhaps not so well suited to their difficult tasks; but the play was so overwhelming that one can only conjecture what effect it would have produced if all had stood on the same plane as Miss Matthison—the one young artist who could render Phillips's Francesca to perfection.

As for the play, naïve in construction, slow of action, long-winded in its language, it is one of those manifestations which clearly show how much higher was the aim of the drama in periods so remote that we even fail to trace the author. Probably he was a Flemish priest, one of those who dispensed wise lessons in the fascinating form of plays of mysteries and morality. But whoever he was, his dramatic instinct, his imagination was such that it excites our admiration to-day. Here, then, is drama that connects stage and Church, that can be heard by all, whether they be orthodox believers or *Everymen*, who see no harm, but benefit and delight in the theatre. For in this play, which at its close was greeted by reverent silence instead of applause, the one note was struck which rings in the mental clavier of all men:

And remember Beauty, Five wits,
 Strength and Discretion,
 They all at last do Everyman forsake,
 Save his good Deeds.

It is a remarkable performance, remarkably set in the picturesque scenery of the Elizabethan period. And if it were but sufficiently known among the millions of London, it would be the talk of every man.

CRITERION THEATRE: "THE GIRL FROM MAXIM'S"

MARCH 30, 1902

I

As one man the many-tongued London Press has pronounced its anathema on the latest importation from Paris. The play has been condemned part and parcel; it was literally torn to shreds by many writers whose pens seemed red-hot with the indignation of outraged morality. Why this severity? this unanimity? Was the play bad? Decidedly. Was it worse than many others, either French or home-made? Certainly not. Was it more "shocking"—to use the term which covers a multitude of unpleasant sensations—more shocking than the substance of several generally accepted musical comedies and the songs and gestures of some music-hall troubadours? Again: No. *The Girl from Maxim's* simply had the misfortune to come at the wrong moment, and the fault of having been very clumsily arrayed for her London appearance. The former disadvantage, which may or may not be remotely connected with rumoured indications from high quarters as to the morality of our plays, would have counted for little if the play had been clever, or even merely amusing. But that was not the case. Somehow, the whole machine seemed to have been disjointed and put together anew by unskilled hands.

The humour of the dialogue, which in all conscience was poor enough in the original, had lost all its flavour in the process of disinfection. The drollery of some scenes, which were truly laughable in Paris, had evaporated in transit across the Channel. Even the mechanical means of producing merriment—I refer to the famous “leg-curtsey” across the chair’s back (“as they salute in Paris”) and the business repeated *ad nauseam* with the electric chair—failed to ignite the public. They laughed, yes, but it was the guffaw of the boor and the boy who would hail a monkey and his tricks as a great comedian, not the spontaneous, electric, and electrifying laughter of people who row in unison in the boat of gaiety.

The reason of all this is that in this play the process of adaptation has come to grief, has distinctly and pointedly demonstrated its incurable defects. Here was a play French to the core. Every character had a specifically French *tourmure* altogether unknown to the majority of our playgoers. The situations were so French that the attempt to force them into the stays of English propriety bereft them of form, figure, and fascination. The dialogue was so bold and so badly uncompromising that it staggered even the Parisians for awhile, but here it became so pointless, so flabby, that one’s patience was sorely tried under the ordeal of listening. Yet in spite of all the energy wasted to make the French thing English, the result was a strange mixture of fatuity, neither French nor English, yet labelled with French names and reduced to such vulgarity as was deemed to be acceptable to the patrons of Anglo-French farce-comedy. For the nonce, however, those patrons who had cheerfully passed the one thousand and one tales of merry infidelity which followed *Pink Dominoes* demurred. They considered that the acquaintance of a girl of Maxim’s was undesirable and that her manners were abominable, and so they prompted the Press by vociferous hisses to let draconic

severity for once take the place of its usual indulgent tolerance.

II

I have seen worse farces than this perversion of Feydeau's—which he himself would scarcely recognise,—but I have rarely seen an *ensemble* of greater insufficiency. Not a soul seemed to realise that this was a farcical comedy. Oh, yes, one did, and that was Mr. Ivan Berlin, who had to play a two-lined footman, and showed more fun in his arch demeanour than all the other gentlemen, whether they were comic generals or gallant *abbés galants*. A play of this kind must be fired off the boards like a volley projected by skilled artillerists. But our good actors laboured like recruits at gun practice. They took their time over everything; over their words; over their movements; over their exits. “If you don't arrive to-day, there may be a chance to-morrow,” seemed to be the general motto; and thus the tedious action jolted, crawled, wobbled sleepily along like the trains on a notorious London railway system. The ladies in particular spared no effort to delay the progress of the action. And by the time the crowd of little actresses in the third act had enunciated their little lines with the deliberation of novices, a languor took possession of the house which nothing short of a marvel could have dispelled. Now, the four characters who carried the play were the General of Mr. Herbert Standing, the husband of Mr. E. W. Garden, the wife of Miss Erskine, and Praline, the Maxim Girl of Miss Beatrice Ferrar. Of this quartette only one was satisfactory. I refer to Mr. Garden. He played on somewhat old-fashioned, broad and solid lines, but he was safe. He commanded the stage and helped the play on. Mr. Herbert Standing, too, commanded the stage, but it was an autocratic command, with scant regard for the army beside him.

Mr. Standing has a time-honoured predilection for the centre of the stage, and he seems to enjoy his own platform oratory. This is sometimes very refreshing, but not in farcical comedy, where every man ought to remember that he is but a small cog-wheel of the machinery, and that if he fails to revolve harmoniously with the others he may bring the whole action to a standstill. Moreover, Mr. Standing, with the head of a French General, betrayed the tongue of a true British tourist. His "Mede-arm" (madame) is gradually becoming a classic.

It would be easy to find fault with the casting of nearly every character in this play, and to adduce concise reasons for such criticism; but I must be somewhat discursive in explaining why the conspicuous failure of the play is to some extent due to the selection of the chief interpreter. In saying this I candidly mean neither to condemn the acting of Miss Beatrice Ferrar nor to cause her pain. The choice fell upon her, and, as a conscientious artist, she did her best. But she was in no sense the woman for the part. That she has no notion of the Moulin Rouge and its womankind is evident, and certainly no fault. That she is the incarnation of an English maiden, and, therefore, has nothing in common with the gay Parisienne, is likewise a fact beyond the sphere of criticism. That she is a charming comedy-player in one sense of the word, and not a French *comédienne*, denotes how very valuable Miss Beatrice Ferrar is in her place in home-grown plays. But—and this is the point—to carry and to save a play like this different qualities are required. This does not imply that I long for a copy of *Mdlle. Cassive*, who, if anything, intensified the nature of the character. No English actress would be permitted to do and say the things which even proved camels to the well-seasoned Parisian first-nighters. But between the two kinds of acting, the frivolous of France and the stolid of Britain, there is a mean,

without which every feather-light farce is bound to fail. It amounts to this, that the actor or actress must thoroughly understand how to achieve a great and continuous effect without exhibiting any signs of exertion. Lips, face, limbs, they must all act spontaneously. There must be no self-consciousness ; no insistence on funny lines and incidents ; no awkward movements which seem unnatural to the body and mark fatigue ; no primness instead of that indescribable thing " chic." In fine, if such plays as *The Girl from Maxim's* are brought over at all, the selection of the cast ought not to be guided by the successes achieved by the actors in *English* plays, but by the fitness of the actor's personality to represent French characters. We are always ready to laugh when a Frenchman impersonates a " Milord." Is it not time for us to consider the smiles of our neighbours when they see what we make of their girls from Maxim and other Parisians ?

SHAFTESBURY: "ALL ON ACCOUNT OF ELIZA"

A RUSTIC COMEDY IN THREE ACTS, BY
LEO DIETRICHSTEIN

APRIL 6, 1902

I

THE pity of it, that farcical comedies must have a third act! If there were but two there would rarely be a slip 'twixt promise and success. Bnt easy as it seems to entangle different threads into a puzzling knot, it is quite another question to unravel the skeins. Some writers, very bold men, make light of their difficulty; they do not attempt to solve, they merely hew their tangled skein in twain and finish the story anyhow. But all such drastic measures are not as satisfying to the world at large as the master stroke of the Great Alexander. And so it comes to pass that an audience, jubilant over the fanciful complications of a second act, lose their temper (and their sense of equity) when the conclusion of the play falls short of expectations.

That was precisely the case with Mr. Leo Dietrichstein's *All on Account of Eliza*. The play started off right enough in true comedy fashion. The first scene in the village "drug store" ran a trifle slowly, but that was the fault of English actresses battling fiercely with the dialogue of American satire.

At all events, it was an interesting peep into the ideas, the cackle, and the jealousies of American "Petty-townery," and from the first we all liked Eliza, the pretty city mouse, stranded as a schoolmistress in a country village. The girl's situation was amusing and pathetic. She was dainty, and her looks made "rubber-necks" of the men; hence jealousy of the rustic matrons who had either too much figure or none at all; hence spying, insinuation, slander, all the hocus-pocus of people with small brains and no horizon. Then, after a vivid exposition, full of clever twists of the American language, came the love interest: Eliza courted by the grey-haired Dutch-American, president of the School Board, and Eliza conquered by his fresh and well-educated young son. All that was charming and rustic in the true sense of the word; it was full of sentiment without being sentimental. We relished its sweetness without tasting the treacle which is so frequently the chief ingredient of our home-grown idylls. Even the scene in which the old man in his broken, Germanised, unsophisticated manner of speech, timidly offered his autumnal love, excited much pleasure and just a wee touch of emotion, for it was delicately handled. It ceased to be ludicrous because it was so truly sincere, and thus things went on logically, pleasantly. Happy thoughts enlivened the action. 'Cute flashes of humour illuminated the unpretentious dialogue. Only here and there a line cropped up which was too "truly rural" to be palatable to our taste, accustomed as it is to the (stage) parlance of Mayfair and good society generally. But suddenly, towards the middle of the second act, the author, perhaps at the end of his Latin, flung a brick into his neat conservatory of comedy. He destroyed the pretty natural character of Eliza by letting her sing a French song all too gay and dance a step whirling frocks, frills, and furbelows. It was a mistake all the greater because Eliza had only just succeeded in

clearing her character before the School Board and the assembled village vixens of all sorts of ignominious accusations. From that moment I felt that we had to bid adieu to comedy, and would henceforth plunge headlong into the irresponsibility of farce. And, alas, my instinct was right. Farce it became—and *horribile dictu*!—American farce of the species with which we are only too familiar since *The Belle of New York*. Now it was all over with characterisation, with rusticity, with idylls, and with sentiment. Clownery took their place—clownery with an old man divesting himself (decently) of his clothes in a real bedroom, clownery with a middle-aged housekeeper *en negligé*, with twenty night-gowned villagers carrying lanterns as in the *Postillon de Lonjumeau* of old; clownery, too, in rain, a real shower; a douche deemed so necessary to whip the dying fun into life that Mr. Sullivan, the comedian, whispered into the “flies”: “Turn it on! Turn it on!”

That rain damped our interest, and although the majority gradually cheered the author for $66\frac{2}{3}$ per cent. of good fun, a minority expressed its dissatisfaction all on account of $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent. of disappointment.

II

But, unless the experience that one irresistible comedian can make a comedy prove fallacious, Mr. Leo Dietrichstein's play will survive its partial defeat. Mr. James E. Sullivan, already famous as “the polite lunatic,” is in himself an evening's entertainment. He is a comedian of the first rank and of rare intuition. His Anglo-German prattle is invariably amusing, and, for those who know both languages, a jargon to render them uproariously hilarious. His fun is but rarely forced, and when it is the fault lies less with the actor than with the licence vouchsafed by some six hundred

appearances in *The Belle of New York*. For musical comedy, excellent though it be to render "stocks" animated, is likely to make lively people all too mobile. But, besides comedy, Mr. Sullivan has two other talents, both innate and invaluable. He is ubiquitous, that is, he is as good as an entire play, and he knows how to weave a fine silken thread of true feeling into the coarser material of farcical comedy. That is why the old man's protestations of love were so unobtrusive and so unexceptionable; that is also why one day, I make bold to predict, this versatile artist will delight us as a character-actor of intense power. Miss Madge Lessing played Eliza, and practically shared the burden of the play with Mr. Sullivan, for besides them only Miss Katharine Stewart, admirable and truly amusing as an old housekeeper of many summers, had a part allowing of characterisation. Miss Madge Lessing is, like Mr. Sullivan, a graduate from musical tomfoolery and pantomime to boot, which in her case implies that she has more to unlearn than to acquire. By nature she is undoubtedly a comedienne endowed with great gifts and no little charm. Her assurance is great, her knowledge of stage-craft astounding. Her presence galvanised a crowd of minor characters into life and movement. Her diction, too, is as precise and polished as her French is unspeakable. (Why on earth must a French song be sung by a singer who has no ear for the language?) But Miss Lessing has one fault, common to all who have lingered too long in musical entertainments: she never forgets her audience, she is always conscious of herself; and in a character like Eliza, which is spoilt if the touch of nature is interfered with, the very essence of the charm is unaffectedness and a seeming indifference to the sayings and doings of the surroundings. As this is Miss Lessing's first appearance in comedy in London, these little habits of a former career may wear off,

but they certainly detract in some measure from an otherwise bright and delightful impersonation.

It is not necessary to criticise the other performers, all of whom had little parts of no greater importance than that they demanded swiftness of tongue before all, and after that a nice sense of bustle and alertness in motion. The motion of the limbs was generally lively enough, but somehow the tongue could not always follow in the chase. There was a distinct indication as to who among the crowd of actors were Americans and who English. The Americans were always easy winners, and the English came in second — "slow, but sure."

AVENUE THEATRE: "THE LITTLE FRENCH MILLINER"

A FARCE IN THREE ACTS, ADAPTED FROM MAURICE
HENNEQUIN AND ALBIN VALABREGUE'S PLAY,
"CORALIE ET CIE"

APRIL 13, 1902

I

"HALF a mo' is all a good listener wants," said the music-hall luminary when he was asked to translate a familiar French adage. And I propose to give no more than an inkling of the plot of *The Little French Milliner*. But such an indication is necessary, for reasons to be specified later. Well, Coralie, the milliner, owned two establishments, the one a *bonâ fide* costumière business, the other a so-called afternoon tea club, which could be fitly described as a tobogganing slide towards the Divorce Court. About the dressmaking business we learn little, but in the tea club we are allowed to spend a few hilarious moments as impartial yet interested spectators of little games between other men's wives and other women's husbands. These little games are perhaps a trifle trite so long as they are played on the usual lines, but when from a Black Forest clock the cuckoo utters a warning cry, and one touch of scared fingers on an electric bell turns the tea-room before our eyes into a respectable, business-like milliner's show-room, we cannot suppress an exclamation of admira-

tion. The trick is novel, and so irresistible that the play is safe, never mind what preceded, never mind what follows. There's but one swallow in the air, but it does herald summer and harvest.

Having said this much about the plot I can safely leave the rest to your imagination, with a hint as to what that play must have been in France. I myself have not seen the original, I can only guess, but an old acquaintance with Hennequin and Valabrègue tells me that the fun must have been furious at the Palais Royal, and that its fastness was at a rate tolerated only in the city of chauffeurs. The English adapter, hiding in nameless modesty, had therefore an excessively difficult task; for to make Parisian farce respectable is often to render it dull, or if the coarseness is anglicised the result is fatal, as in *The Girl from Maxim's*. In this dilemma our adapter has remembered that audacity often wins the day, and he has drawn his blue pencil through all that was too salacious, leaving just enough piquancy for amusement without offence. Thus *The Little French Milliner* has become an agreeable entertainment of the digestive order, and it will no doubt please all those good playgoers who are willing to shut an eye for the sake of a good laugh. As for the moralist, he had better stay at home with our daughters. With the exception of a few doubtful repartees, it is intrinsically a harmless farce, but, like strong liqueurs, it will not suit all livers nor all ages.

II

The actor of the evening was Mr. Robb Harwood in the character of the milliner's husband, a lean philanthropist living on the fat of the land. It was an admirable performance. I thought of Germain and of Baron, those two world-famed comedians who have led hundreds of farces to fame. Making a little allowance for the

insular temperament, Mr. Harwood is quite their equal ; he was not content to act and to bustle, but he composed a character of the farcical material—we are likely to remember this quaint specimen of human parasitism, and that is the highest praise we can give to a comedian. Excellent, too, was Miss Hilda Trevelyan as a maid, and Miss Ruth Benson as a negress. The vocabulary of the one was more or less confined to the invective “cat,” addressed to an elderly aunt-in-law, but every utterance of the word told its perfect tale ; Miss Benson, on the other hand, gave the negress to the life, including dental splendour, gaping jaws, and drooping nether lips. One could never divine a comely fair American woman under the perfect mask of that “blackie.” Mr. Arthur Williams, in his familiar character of a middle-class husband in tribulation, elicited many a laugh, and Miss Kate Phillips, though somewhat damped in her ardour by first-night and managerial pre-occupation, was fascinating and vivacious as the Anglo-French milliner. Then there was Mr. Vane-Tempest, quite safe and drily humorous in a nondescript part, and Miss Maud Hobson, who had dash enough to justify her being a “lady from America.” But there were also several weak spots in the cast. As is frequently the case, the men were heavy and far too solemn for the ludicrous occasion, and the ladies assumed an air of dignified composure which is everywhere in its right place except in the helter-skelter little world of farce.

Somehow the performance wanted what one commonly calls “pulling together.” There was too much humming and hawing, too much halting and deliberation. Some of our actors cannot by virtue of their nature get easily over this stolidity, but after a week’s *ensemble* it is probable that the majority will drag the laggards into the rapids of irresponsibility, and then the players and the play will be fairly matched.

WYNDHAM'S THEATRE: "THE END OF A STORY"

APRIL 13, 1902

THE end of the story is as it should be. The "Wedding March" is heard, and the hero of fifty leads the bride of twenty-five to the altar. Towards the end of the story there is also one very funny scene, mainly about bottles of old wine. And it goes down very well. All of which is grateful and comforting.

But I have my doubts about the rest of the story, which is a penny novelette, familiarly heralded in by indiscretions of five-and-twenty years ago, for in

CHAPTER I

The hero (fifty, aristocratic, diplomatist, and agriculturist, having freely sown his wild oats) confesses to the heroine that he would like to, but that he must not, for he has . . . and then she blushes and asks no more. He is about to confess the mystery of his early life, when he remarks that every good chapter of a story must be continued in our next.

CHAPTER II

Banks of the Avon. Stratford of the Bard. A villa, cosy with creepers, honeysuckle, and a canary. In it

lives a novelist. One of her books was called "The Record of the King," and in four months it has run through ten editions. Her works always do. She almost rivals Miss Marie Corelli, but her name is Eleanor Murray. Eleanor had a mother; father, for the present, not ascertained. There is a photo of the mother; it stands on a prominent table by the piano. Enter the hero. They talk; talk a great deal. Talk about the future; the propagation of a noble species. She is amazingly naïve, yet wonderfully world-wise, the little novelist! Talk also about a certain locket. The conversation, in true English fashion, winds up with music. That brings us near the piano and the photo. "Who is that?" he asks. And she—crimson with shame and in tears—exclaims, "My mother!"

It is the bitter cry of the lacerated heart. We are now seasoned for

CHAPTER III

Prefecture de Police, Paris; lofty room, lofty scenery, Notre Dame, the Seine, the blue air, the grey Morgue, all on canvas. The hero has come in search of his wife. The Prefect with the courtly smile of the French official knows all about her. Every man and woman have their little record at the Prefecture. Madame's number is 4002, and her adventures read like a tale of Scheherezade of "1001 Arabian Nights." One touch of an electric bell brings the woman of the half-world in. Ah! these meetings after five-and-twenty years! Ah! these painful calculations to establish fatherhood after so long a space of time! However, Madame's hazy past divulges one clear point. Eleanor Murray is her daughter and his. But was it not laid down in *Le Fils de Coralie* (by Albert Delpit, 1872), in *Odette* (by Sardou) that the infamous mother of an innocent daughter must die? And in strict obedience to this dogma Madame writes a letter which is a direct

indication that suicide will smooth the course of true love.

* * * * *

Here there is a little *entre-acte* for reflection, recollection, and recapitulation of chapter iv., which, as has been gathered from my introductory remarks, brought about that happy solution which is prompted by (what Mr. Wyndham called in his curtain speech) "week-end's exuberance."

* * * * *

I now add a chapter of my own, purely commentary, which contains the

EPILOGUE

A CHAPTER OF WISHES

1. That the two other plays of the new author, which are said to be accepted for production, may be less amateurish and not so slavishly dependent on Messrs. Scribe, Sardou, and a dozen older authors, French and English.

2. That Mrs. Bernard Beere may once and for all remain faithful to the stage, where she is ever welcome, and where her gifts, her pathos, and her power (as has been proved once more) are not only appreciated, but truly wanted.

3. That Miss Mary Moore may continue to look young, and to impersonate youth so placidly and pleasantly that all old stories like this may give us moments of freshness.

4. That Miss May Congdon's speech will become as distinguished as her looks.

5. That Mr. Wyndham may have many splendid chances as an evergreen *jeune-premier*, but that he may

be spared the ordeal of supplying by emphasis and violent gesture that which the author ought to have expressed in convincing dialogue.

6. Also (and finally) that the pruning-knife may be vigorously applied, and that the gods behave with propriety when, for the nonce, a great actor-manager forgets that indifferent plays are better redeemed by golden silence than by silvery eloquence.

IMPERIAL THEATRE: REVIVAL OF "THE DEGENERATES"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS BY SYDNEY GRUNDY.

APRIL 20, 1902

I

"Go along, Mr. Grundy, I hate this jawing. You may fancy your play is as right as rain; but I—I am not taking any, and you deserve beans for bringing such a sorry lot on the stage."

Excuse my introduction, dear reader, and let me assure you that I shall not continue in this strain, although, if there is such a thing as measure for measure, I should be bound to write my notice in the same style as that affected by Mr. Grundy in his play of degradation, *The Degenerates*.

And pray do not believe for one moment that I am the proud originator of the slang terms which open this article. They are Mr. Grundy's very own. They are live weeds culled from the pasture of his work. Such is, according to Mr. Grundy, the language of a society in which we encounter a baronet and his lady, an honourable gentleman, a viscount, and a duke—his Grace of Orme. All these more or less ignoble specimens of the nation's nobility, to say nothing of wealthy Uitlanders, Hebrews, and *rastaguouères*—concentrate around a woman whom one would politely describe as a *demi-mondaine*, but who, in reality, ranks

several degrees below that famous fraction of the ingenious Dumas. For her past is best left alone, and her present is a competition between the highest bidder and the highest gambler. She is the essence of social degeneration, and, until she is conquered by the lovable innocence of her child, she rebels against the thought of her motherhood, because growing daughters are the mirrors of a mother's age. And with these people, with their intrigues, their mental abnormality, their unspeakable manners and violations of polite language, we have to pass the whole of an evening, unredeemed by the stimulation of our thoughts, by the defence of a thesis, by any purpose of enlightenment, of betterment or combat. Unlike *Le Demi-Monde*, which elicited an outcry of abuse, yet was a play of moral principles, *The Degenerates* has no justification for its existence. It had, indeed, a vogue when it saw the light two years ago, but that was not prompted by merit, it was stimulated by the unwholesome nature of the thing. The crowd likes to mix with the moral lepers of society; it tolerates stage characters who utter language which in daily life would provoke immediate ostracism; it fears the nakedness of truth, but it relishes the gauze-screen nudity of the heroine of *The Degenerates*. It all depends on the treatment. An Ibsen is condemned because he is in earnest and uncompromising; a Grundy is acclaimed because he is flippant, and dispenses his unpleasant story with theatrical trickery and a handful of jokes. Yet, do I not remember aright that Grundy was in the vanguard of those who condemned the "nastiness" of Ibsen?

II

The Degenerates is not only distasteful on account of its ethics. It has the additional fault of being false from beginning to end—or at least to very nearly the

end. For the last scene of all, in which the author, as it were, makes amends, strikes a human note of conciliation and is prettily contrived. These degenerates as depicted by Mr. Grundy do not exist in the *milieu* in which he has placed them. Their parlance is not tolerated in our midst. Their manners are beyond our experience of Society. These people do not act by intuition, they manœuvre by will of the author, who has read (and adapted) many French artificial plays, and knows how to allot to each of them a little part in the game of *esprit* and stratagem. All along the hand of the wire-puller is felt, and when in the third act, Degenerate No. II., hiding behind Door A, is saved by Degenerate No. I., to escape from Door B, while Degenerate-husband No. III. is knocking at Door C, I see Mr. Grundy at home with a tiny theatre before him, drilling his puppets in such a mathematical fashion that, according to the rules of the well-made play, the climax can be forecast to the minute. Twenty years ago, when we hardly knew better, when Scribe was only just becoming old-fashioned, and Sardou, in his prime, played the game to perfection, this kind of business had its charms. But then the plots had some romantic interest, some fantasy, and there was, above all, something in the style of the dialogue which covered a multitude of tricks and improbabilities. But in *The Degenerates* there is squalor instead of charm, slang instead of wit, and for an ounce of romance there is a pound of disagreeable would-be realism against which reality protests.

III

If the revival of *The Degenerates* meets with patronage, it will be by virtue of its dubious nature, and for the reason that it shows Mrs. Langtry at her best. Strange to say, in the last ten years Mrs. Langtry has done nothing so satisfactory as the impersonation of

Mrs. Trevelyan, and if she had but the gift of expressing emotion, and of kindling ours, hers would be a performance of excellence. So long as Mrs. Trevelyan is in lighter vein, Mrs. Langtry is very amusing and full of life. The *comédienne* is in her, and a good point is hardly ever missed. The "great coquette" belongs also to her domain, and I imagine several plays in the Dumas-Augier-Feuillet *repertoire* that would add to her reputation. But Mrs. Langtry has scant pathos. The scenes with the daughter—the only scenes of sentiment in the play—are not convincing. Somehow, the intonations do not match the words. She recites her lines, she does not live them. Miss Lily Grundy, on the other hand, as sweet an English girl as one can well imagine, has that delicate sense of pathos which all at once conquers an audience. Miss Mabel Hackney, trying to do well and to carry us away, exceeded the limit time after time. Her diction was "explosive"; in endeavouring to portray passion she merely exhibited ire. It was a laboured performance, not unlike that of Miss Mabel Beardsley, who constantly conversed with the public instead of addressing her fellow players. Miss Beardsley also lacks repose; she plays, I would fain call it, in sections; her head, her body, her limbs, all move independently, and the result is a motion strangely pell-mell. Under the guidance of a capable stage-manager these shortcomings of a very intelligent artist would easily disappear. That useful individual who, in our theatres, is rarely more than a second fiddle, might also initiate Mr. William Devereux into the difference between the *fortissimo* of melodrama and the *piano* of real drama. Mr. Devereux was laying on his colours in merciless profusion, that seemed to be altogether out of proportion to the words of the character. Mr. Aubrey Smith's rendering of the Duke of Orme was distinguished by reserve and an impressive dignity of manner and speech. His conception

differs from that of his predecessor, who made the Duke more a man of the world and a *viveur*. There is much to be said for both, although a vivacious Duke would render yeoman service to relieve the tameness of two introductory acts replete with idle talk.

HAYMARKET: REVIVAL OF "CASTE"

APRIL 27, 1902

THE famous play is in the thirties, but like certain fair women it remains twenty-nine evermore. There are wrinkles here and there, a good many lines betray that to-day's complexion of things is not that of thirty years ago. We are now apt to smile at certain sentiments and sentimentalities which were accepted in an earnest spirit when *Caste* first saw the light, but withal the thing remains fresh, wholesome, buoyant in its humour, sound in its pathos, and not so very absurd after all in the profusion of "morals" which the author dispenses through his characters in rich doses and old-fashioned spoons. And even though the play may betray wear and tear, the characters that people it seem indestructible. On Eccles, on Polly, on Sam, on Hawtree, there is an impress which I would fain call immortality, if that word were not too pretentious for such simple folks. But this is certain, as long as Thackeray's and Dickens' creations live, so long will the sympathetic *Caste* family be remembered. For although Robertson did not stand on the same plane as the masters, he was fairly near the throne, and like them he understood how to make his characters sympathetic.

From an acting point of view, too, the characters of *Caste* are indestructible. There is but one that could threaten failure, for it has become a living tradition. For all time the Polly of Marie Wilton will be the

touchstone of all newcomers. But the rest is safe as a rock, and an absolutely unsatisfactory performance of *Caste* is beyond the range of our memory.

On this occasion, when at one of the best-managed theatres in the English-speaking world a revival was decided upon in the wake of a successful *matinée*, the cast of the play was of unusual interest. For every member of it has made a name, and achieved a record of note. No wonder, then, that the performance was, on the whole, of all-round excellence. One might wish Mr. Brandon Thomas, as Hawtree, to adhere more closely to the conventional conception and be more of the "swell," with all the airs and graces embodied in that word. One might wish Miss Winifred Emery, a comely Esther, to gain greater control of her voice; one might wish for more colour in two acts of Mr. Cyril Maude's *Eccles*, and for a less obtrusive dipsomania in the last, with a suitable curtailment of the none too effective pipe-lighting scene. But these are details that will shape themselves as the players grow more familiar with the play. The cardinal point is that the revival, besides showing a d'Alroy (Mr. Allen Aynsworth) fine and manly, revealed three impersonations of singular distinction. I refer to the Polly of Miss Tempest, the Sam Gerridge of Mr. George Giddens, and the Marquise of Miss Genevieve Ward, the latter an incarnation of a *grande dame* such as is altogether unrivalled upon our stage. The Sam of Mr. Giddens was original from first to last. He cannot be compared to any of the numerous Gerridges of my acquaintance. But I prefer him to all, for he added just enough polish to the somewhat roughish surface to render it more agreeable, more in harmony with Polly's natural frankness and Esther's gentleness. Moreover, in Mr. Giddens humour is innate. He need not make efforts to cause laughter, he makes laughter by the roundness of his face and manner; *bonhommie* literally pours forth from him, and in whatever he does there is that natural

touch which warms every spectator to goodwill and contentment. Truly Mr. Giddens, younger than many youths, is a model comedian, and he is superior to most comic actors in that he can at will change his mirth into pathos.

As for Miss Tempest, whenever I see her I feel happy that I was among the first to predict what has become true. She is *the* comédienne of the British stage, not only by virtue of her personality, but also by her intellect. Her performances, whether of Nell, or of Becky, or of Polly, are creations of intuition. Yes, we feel study, we feel careful plodding, and invention; we feel that behind this performance so precise, so finely calculated in movement and in diction, there lies work of the hardest. But nothing is laboured. The study, the invention, the work, they have crystallised into something vital—something natural brought to perfection by artistic instinct. I have no mind to compare Miss Tempest to Lady Bancroft: if I had I should let the thought perish. For me there is but one question: Is Miss Tempest the Polly I saw before my mental eye when I read Robertson's play? is she all youth, all exuberance, all good-nature, all that is feminine and feline in the nicest sense of the word? And to that question, I submit, there is but one answer. It is an unqualified affirmative.

LYCEUM : REVIVAL OF "FAUST"

APRIL 27, 1902

A beautiful spectacle ; a desultory drama ; a poet-aster's poem ; such is the Lyceum *Faust*. Goethe has scarce anything to do with this child of many fathers. A mere outline of his features is still traceable, but the flesh is Wills', and the frame is the joint *opus* of the many brains that co-operate in Lyceum productions. The total impression is, under these circumstances, weird and wonderful, and not a little unsatisfactory. What there remains of art belongs to the scene-painters and to the actors ; what there remains of poetry is a faint glimmer of the world-famed legend ; what there remains of tragedy is the pathos of virginity sacrificed for the sake of love and passion. As for the exquisite poetry, the fathomless mine of thought and verbal beauty, it has all vanished under the slaughtering hand of the adapter and his henchmen. The bloom has been brushed away, the branches have been lopped, and the very root has been carved into by the merciless pruning-knife. In this enforced naturalisation the German Shakespeare's work has lost well-nigh all but its name. Goethe's *Faust*, a glorious creature of romantic fantasy, has become a pauper on our shores. His author would not recognise him, and those who worship Goethe as a master can but bewail that out of a creation so great has crept a thing so little.

But let us leave the sorry story of the play for the somewhat gladder record of the acting.

Above all, it should be acknowledged that since Sir Henry Irving produced *Faust* some seventeen years ago, his Mephistopheles has vastly improved. Time has worn on, but the actor has grown younger. Formerly his Mephisto was merely a clever effort of acting, to-day it is a splendid study in sarcasm. This ruler of the Nether-World has nothing tragic, nothing awe-inspiring. He does not cause us to shiver; he does not haunt our slumbers; he exhilarates us; he fascinates us in his devilish way by the caustic flashes of his humour. In his Mephisto Sir Henry reaches the highest mark of his intellectual art, and whether he eggs on Faust, or whether he quizzes the gullible Martha, he has a powerful ally on his side. Our sense of humour feels strangely stimulated by this remarkable impersonation, and while we are thus interested we forsake closer inspection of the character of this very vital Satan. Irving's genius overwhelms tradition and convention. Let others show us Mephisto the grim and the awful; Irving's Mephisto, the joyous rogue, holds his own.

If Miss Cecilia Loftus were as great an artist as Sir Henry, we might treat her Margaret in the same independent manner. But the budding talent of the former does not as yet allow her to be judged by the same high standard as Irving's mature genius. In Miss Loftus, then, we see great intentions and, as yet, but a moderate amount of achievement. Of Germany's Gretchen she has little; neither her poetry, nor her perpetual "seventh heaven," have yet that sublime innocence which keeps all blonde Teutonic Gretchens from failure. Miss Loftus is in manner and personality a lovable type of the average middle-class English girl—she is nice, she is sweet; she is most agreeable to look at, but sentiment does not run very deep, and except in the jewel scene, which was perfect, there was just wanting the one note of pathos—I prefer the German word *Schwaermerei*—which characterises, un-

does, and defends Margaret. As a promise the performance of Miss Loftus was fairly astonishing, as an artistic creation it was amiable—and nothing more than that.

Somehow in this perversion of the great play the character of Faust is relegated to the back-ground. He is a second fiddle all the time, and to shine in this capacity is a task of no mean order. That Mr. H. B. Stanford made the most of his opportunities, that he looked an ideal Faust, is something to be proud of. One felt that this fervent young actor was handicapped all the time, and that some day we shall discover in him far more power than this performance promised. The Valentine of Mr. Laurence Irving was chivalrous and powerful, but he went too far in his desire to be strong. Such vocal vigour as came from Mr. Laurence Irving in the death-scene is a physical impossibility. Even melodrama would rebel against it, and the tragedy of the situation certainly does. The Martha of Miss M. A. Victor was full of humour, and was well-matched to Mephisto's devilry.

Altogether it was a remarkable production of *Faust*, none the less because the tragedy of Goethe was totally eclipsed and comedy was the key-note of the evening.

PRINCE OF WALES'S THEATRE : "THE PRESIDENT"

A FARCICAL MELODRAMA IN THREE ACTS, BY
FRANK STAYTON

MAY 4, 1902

THE Republics of South and Central America are a happy hunting-ground. One has but to read the exploits of the *Libertador*, better known as the British merchant steamer *Ban Righ*, in Columbian and Venezuelan waters, to realise that the impossible is still possible in the lands where there are more generals than privates ; where postage-stamps are grist for the hungry mill of State ; where the President of to-day may be a prisoner to-morrow, for no other reason than the inexorable law of change and intermittent revolutions. The very atmosphere of these excitable States is pregnant with laughter and mockery ; and he must be a very poor wit indeed who could not add to the gaiety of nations by poking fun at the surging little world below the belt of the Equator. Yet strange to say, although Paris has had its hours of joy with Achille I., King of Patagonia, with Marie I., Roy of the Sedangs ; with Jules Gros, President of Counani—all exceedingly nice and inoffensive gentlemen dealing in stars and ribbons ; while Guzman Blanco would supply a library of adventure with countless humorous volumes, no one had as yet brought these curious characters on the

stage. The operetta had, here and there, a fling at them, but that was *en passant*. The elaborate satire of a subject of infinite possibilities has been a long time in coming, and now that it has arrived in the guise of Mr. Stayton's farcical melodrama *The President*, we are still in the position of Jacob after his seven years' service for the homely Leah.

Mr. Stayton had, indeed, a good idea to start with. The folks of San Juan, somewhere in postage-stamp land, were tired of their cash-collecting President, and fomented a little revolution to get rid of him. In search of a substitute they found a young Englishman, who, lounging indolently, and recovering from the effects of a jilt on San Juan's picturesque shores, was not unwilling to undertake the Presidential job in order to prove to a pretty English lady visitor that he was not as indolent as he seemed. This proposition in itself is so quaint that one would willingly swallow several camels, provided that the ingenious initiation were followed up by an equally humorous evolution. But Mr. Stayton, having determined to stick to his label and to give us a farcical melodrama, whatever that may mean, begins to wobble about not only between farce and melodrama, but across the whole range, which embraces all kinds and forms of playwriting except tragedy. The inevitable outcome of this jumble of styles is a musical comedy, minus songs and dance—or, to be quite accurate, minus dance and songs save one, and that one, with a very ungracious reference to our vanquished foe, could not only be spared, but, as a matter of fact, was the precursor of the play's chilly reception.

What is wanting all the time is music and all the rest of the stock-in-trade of musical comedy. And since there is no music to supplement the text, another want makes itself felt, and that is characterisation and local colour besides that of the scenery. For, although Mr. Stayton has the gift of the humorist, which is

amply proved by many a good line and several amusing situations, his facile method has altogether overlooked the necessity of rendering his subject typical. His President, splendidly impersonated by Mr. Robert Pateman, is not a South American type at all. At best he is a skit on Irish Members of Parliament. His talk lacks all the warmth, the imagery, the grandiloquence of countries where the tailor who threatens county court proceedings still remains "your humble servant who kisses your hand ;" where bombast goes further than common-sense argument, where in the vein of satire a *chevalier d'industrie* should behave like a *preux* Chevalier Bayard. Here Mr. Stayton has missed innumerable chances to make merry over all the funny institutions of little Republics, from their traffic in decorations to their manner of governing. Again, the three Ministerial officers have nothing peculiar to the officialdom of countries like San Juan. They reminded me forcibly of the two Macs minus their clubs, and with Mr. Arthur Williams, ever a true Cockney, at their head, they seemed to step right from the stage of a London music-hall, both in manner and in speech.

There remain, then, the characters of the young Englishman and the lady he is to woo, and it must be admitted that in drawing the former the author, whether he be one of ours or an American, has been happier. But then the part is, so to speak, written around the individuality of Mr. Charles Hawtrey—an actor easy to provide for, if due regard is given to his cool-as-a-cucumber style, to his seeming indolence, to his gift of saying a good thing without moving a muscle. That Mr. Hawtrey was less effective than usual, that his declaration of love in its off-hand manner was not even pleasant to listen to, is not the author's fault, nor, perhaps, the actor's. We know what first nights are. Anyhow, it contributed to the scanty effect of the play, in which only Miss Miriam Clements achieved a per-

sonal success by a most charming, most delicate, and refined little sketch of an English society girl. If *The President* is a firstling, let it by all means be conceded that the author reveals some promise. But under all circumstances it must be avowed that the play is strangely incongruous, both in form and development, and that, as it is neither good satire nor uncompromising farce, there was some justification in the attitude of the public, who, after faint applause, left the house both puzzled and disappointed. It was not a very happy welcome to Mr. Hawtrey, whose evening began so well with an exceedingly clever dramatic joke, *Miss Bramshott's Engagement*, by Mr. G. S. Street. But such are the fortunes of war in stage-life. So here's better luck next time, Mr. Hawtrey!

ADELPHI: "SAPHO"

AN ADAPTATION OF ALPHONSE DAUDET'S NOVEL, BY
CLYDE FITCH

MAY 4, 1902

I

LONDON is Mr. Clyde Fitch's bar sinister. In America nearly everything he does succeeds; here he always fails. The truth is that our public is reluctant to endorse the method which New York's most advanced critic, Alan Dale, has characterised and branded as "Fitchic." In other words, our audiences do not like the namby-pamby drama of circumstantial detail in which, for instance, the tying of a bow is a more important factor than a scene upon which both the story and the characters hinge. Now, the new *Sapho*, which is distinguished from the old version by being worse, more ponderous, and unconscionably drawn out, is essentially a drama of wasteful detail. For a quarter of an hour or so this *festina lente* of progress is interesting to the degree of fascination, and when the play opened upon a studio ball of singular colour, vivacity, and picturesque raiment, one felt inclined to whisper: "Hullo! this promises; and it is so much nearer the book than the French version." But when the choreographic revels transgressed the histrionic time limits, and led up to not much more than an exposition of how Sapho met Jean, how Flament was arrested, and how

a word or two served to introduce us to a host of transitory characters, then we soon realised that the first act was merely written for showing Mr. Fitch's usual manner of much ado about nothing. Nor did the adapter honour the prototype of his play by leaving its logical sequence untouched. Even before Fanny Legrand (*Sapho*) went to live with Jean, his ideals were shattered by the conversation of Caoudal, the sculptor, and his friend Dechelette. Wrenched from its right place as it is, this scene, the text of which is almost word for word Daudet's, is the one great moment of the play. It stands out conspicuously, like a stranger of distinction in a motley crowd. But it cuts, as it were, the grass from underneath the feet of all that follows. It destroys whatever romance there is in the sordid story, for now Jean in joining his life to that of the infamous *hetaire*, is no longer the straying "son of twenty." He descends to the same depth as *Sapho*, inasmuch as voluptuousness, not love, nor even passion, is the mainspring of their union. In the book, in the other play, Jean plunged headlong into a youthful romance, and was not sobered until the *liaison* grew the worse for wear. But here there is nothing to beautify the irregular life. It begins with passion unrelieved by any touch of love; it proceeds with snarls and scenes; it ends in violence, in sordid satiety of both parties, intensified by the advent of the neglected love-child and the return of the forger—a bundle of wreckage, ostracised by decent society.

II

The ugliness of the story would be its least fault if there were redeeming factors. Some of Hauptmann's plays deal with the seamy side of life, but they are saved by observation, by power, by characteristic language taken straight from life. And the same may

be said of the French naturalists, of all in fact who see life clearly, with the eye of the painter, and draw it with the pen of the litterateur. Even the French Sapho play has its moments of human interest—moments that tighten the throat and dim the eye, for Daudet's Sapho was a woman of a certain type, yet a woman capable of reclamation by love. But the Sapho of this play is immoral to the core, and were it not that there is a spark of maternity left in her, which harmonises badly with the character as it is presented to us, one would ask whether it is permissible to bring such a *fille de joie* on the stage. For there is no artistic defence of this play of bad manners. It is not good drama, for, apart from its faulty construction and tameness, it violates the laws of symmetry by mangling every character in order to make the main figure paramount. Jean has become a mere lay puppet to be talked to, caressed, and handled by Sapho. Aunt Divonne—liveliest of Daudet's creations—is degraded to a mere gossip; the Hettemas are elaborated monstrosities of materialism; the others, from Uncle Cesaire to Caoudal, are mere shadows—poor flutes and fiddles and drums to accompany the everlasting tirades of Sapho and her *florituri* of sensual movements. True, it was remarked on the first night that the episode with the child was effective—a sort of rugged oasis in the desert—but that was to the credit of the child's drill-master. The poor part was effectively stage-managed, and so, indeed, was the whole of the performance.

III

Ever since her success in *A Fool's Paradise* and *La Dame aux Camélias*, Miss Olga Nethersole has deserved a place among the finest actresses of the English stage. She might be the finest of all if she chose. For she has more than talent, she has genius,

flashes of it at any rate. Her talent is always beyond dispute. It is proof against star-acting and bad plays. But her genius is weighed down by the tyranny of mannerism. Were it not so, her performance of *Sapho* could justly be called great. Yet whenever greatness is in sight, whenever we feel that the influence of great powers is carrying us away, Miss Nethersole does something to break the spell. Either her voice strays into affectation, or her movements are strangely at variance with her words, or she betrays by some crafty device of "business" that she is acting, not living, the situation. In fine, there is a consummate art (not all good art) in her portrayal, but wanting is the heart, the throb, the sob, the abandon, the unconsciousness of surroundings, which conquer the spectator and hold him fast until he bows in worship and submission. In *Sapho* Miss Nethersole has magnificent moments. Her exhortation to Jean to go back to Provence, her reception of the child, her resigned decision to live with the forger—moments in which she is herself and great in grandeur—are unforgettable. The sensual nature of the woman is painted in colours lurid, true, and entrancing. But as a whole, as a work of art, her *Sapho* is not flawless: it is defaced by intonations borrowed from Bernhardt, from Duse, even from Irving, by tricks and cunning which can be traced to everlasting touring and efforts to capture provincial audiences. Plays like *Sapho* and *Carmen*, indifferent stuff withal, cheap articles for exportation, are not Miss Nethersole's domain—she stands on a higher plane, and to remind her of it is to couple earnest criticism with a compliment of rare distinction.

DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE : REVIVAL OF "THE GAY LORD QUEX"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY A. W. PINERO

MAY 11, 1902

I

THE best proof of the quality of a book or play is its capacity of bearing renewed study. For both are not unlike acquaintances in daily life. We may be captivated by the charm of a first meeting, yet the second and the following are, in most cases, decisive of our future relations. Of course, there is such a thing as love at first sight ; yet it is rare, and often its ardour is not lasting ; the rule is, the better you know and fathom, the better you will love. The case of "The Gay Lord Quex" was one of immediate captivation, and the reasons for it were several. We playgoers all revere Pinero ; we are prejudiced in his favour by his record and by the modesty and amiability of the man. Moreover, the play was brilliant, and full of those lightning touches of dialogue and "business" which are the priceless gifts of the born dramatist. Finally, the acting was of rare perfection. All of which are preposessions that cannot fail to carry away the enthusiastic crowd of first-nighters.

But enthusiasm is no guarantee of a lasting impression. Plays that have been hailed at their birth have failed in their earliest days, carefully nursed as they

may have been by eulogism and sumptuous advertisement, for they had no vital force, merely ephemeral charm. No so "The Gay Lord Quex"; it is a play that will live.

I have not come lightly to this conclusion. I have seen the play. I have read it—and many a scene over and over again. I have, after allowing my first excitement to cool down, listened to it once more; and now that every act—nearly every line—is as familiar to me as if I had been the author's secretary or his stage-manager, I must honestly declare that, when I see it performed, it holds me with all the power of a first impression. I will try to explain, yet without irksome details, for now the story is common property and the play is discussed by every one, even by the clerics who have never seen it.

With the story I do not here concern myself. It is not a new story—it may not even be good. I do not crave for fretwork plots and for engrossing situations which are often the sole excuse for the existence of a play. I care for characters, for dashes here and dots there that denote genius, and I am deeply interested in the ethics of a work.

II

Let us deal with the last point. The play has been denounced as immoral because the Duchess of Strood makes an assignation with Quex in her bedroom for a final adieu, in a *peignoir*, and with champagne, Felix Poubelle, Carte d'Or, and cigarettes of the Argyropulos brand. A terrible thing that—a duchess wanting to don "something loose," and to obtain by stealth a double pint of nectar in order to play Delilah to a recalcitrant Samson. And if the occurrence had been disgraced by coarse speech, such as you find in a French farce, I should have been the first to condemn it. For cynical immorality—the wanton thing that

will make people laugh—is unfit to be heard by self-respecting people. But there is nothing cynical in the attitude. It is only the last effort of a passionate woman, married to a wreck of seventy, to reconquer the caresses of one to whom for a long time she was devoted, body and soul. Her proceedings may not be the thing to be represented before maidens and prudes. They may not be comprehended by the population of Suburbia, but minds of a wider horizon will acknowledge their tragic veracity. If fault must be found, it rests, not with the Duchess, who is the prey of her passions, but with Quex, who, reformed, engaged though he was, had not sufficient strength of character to deny a last morsel of satisfaction to his former mistress. Yet Quex (the author might say) was a man—and men are frail vessels. But grant for a moment that the beginning of the third act was immoral in plan, can any one deny that the author has skilfully drawn the line before what was risky became indecent? Is it not true that the man from the first was proof against all temptation, and that, after the indiscretion of coming to the *rendezvous*, he did everything in his power to safeguard the reputation of the amorous Duchess? Some will, notwithstanding this, persist in denouncing the scene; but doing this is narrowing down the drama to namby-pambyism, and proscribing all that passes the limits of superficial characterisation—or, in other words, all that moves the inner man beyond rhetorical effusions of love, chivalry, and honour.

To the squeamish the third act will ever appear offensive, but those who have rightly understood the author will see it in a different light. The last *tête-a-tête* with the Duchess was the purgatory of Lord Quex; that he came out of it unscathed was proof of his regeneration.

The name of the gay Lord Quex forms the title of the play—and very attractive it is. But it would

be wrong to infer therefrom that Quex is the leading character, the real centre of interest. He has certainly much to say; he is the hero and the moraliser (the *raisonneur* of Dumas II.), but after all we are not so much interested in the man, who belongs to the familiar type of old beaux, whom we have very often met before in literature.

We do not mind so much what Quex is or does; two other characters among a crowd, every member of which has its little individuality, rivet our attention. The Duchess, to wit, and the manicurist, Miss Fullgarney. Both are creatures of great originality. The Duchess is the first great "amoureuse" in our modern repertoire who has been drawn with a realistic pencil. We have been shown that kind of woman before—in the *Tyranny of Tears*, for instance—but always softened, always whitewashed for the sake of an unsophisticated audience. Here the woman is represented as she really is—as she is portrayed by Georges de Porto-Riche and by Donnay in *Amoureuse* and in *Georgette Lemeunier*. It was a bold stroke of Mr. Pinero to introduce the woman whose flesh is weak and whose blood is hot into the English drama, and he has done it with a masterly hand. The manners of the Duchess are perfect, and no one could have displayed them with more grace than Miss Fortescue; the Duchess's morals are like the yellow-covered French novels to which she refers, by no means irreproachable, but distinguished by "style." In fine, she is a live woman, not of those who deserve our love, but of those who are much coveted and belong to that particular coterie of the aristocracy which constantly flits *autour du divorce*. Miss Fullgarney, on the other hand, is altogether a "brick." From the first we know what to expect from her, a girl of scant education, but somewhat polished in her graduation from the area, and latterly in her constant friction with good society. Yet it wants very little rubbing to get at the ground colour. Hence her occasional slips into the

language of Cockneydom, her ungraceful adjustment of her garters, her eavesdropping, and her excessive vehemence and impulsiveness in her desire to sever Quex from his *fiancée*. But otherwise what a delightful creature; what an infinite fund of friendship for her foster-sister (that relationship is somewhat hazy and remains unexplained), what wealth of woman's wit and cunning, and, finally, when she has recognised that Quex is better than his reputation, how touching are her attempts at reparation! Her methods may not be those of a lady; for to coax Quex into trouble, and anon to inveigle the captain into a *liaison* as soon as his honeymoon is over, is not in good form. But it is perfectly consistent with the character. It is thus that in the lower walks of life a woman might act to attain the end of what is to her a holy cause. Miss Irene Vanbrugh vivified every shade of this most complex personality with so much subtlety and so much delicate intensity that one may well unite her name to that of the author as the main shareholder in the success.

About the cleverness of the play in its details I would fain fill a column. But this might spoil the interest of those readers who have not yet succeeded in obtaining access to the overcrowded theatre. The *mise-en-scène* is a marvel of dexterity, and in every scene, in the sketch of every character, there is evidence of immense familiarity with the optics of the stage, and, what is more important, with the habits and conceits of our fellow creatures. Mr. Pinero, highly endowed as he is, possesses particularly the gift of characterising men and women by their trifling peculiarities—things which appear to be of no importance—and yet contain a revelation of the inner man. Thus, in spite of the length of the cast, every character has an individuality of its own, not elaborately explained, but firmly moulded in a couple of lines, or in a marginal direction as to attire, manners, and action.

 *The Gay Lord Quex* is indeed the work of a master

craftsman ; but it is far more than that. It is a work that gains the closer and the oftener it is inspected. Its satire and its pathos alike are stimulating, and cannot but evoke animated discussion. There is truth, there is life, there is brain-power in it, and with these only can our drama be rescued from decay.

III

It seems but yesterday—after the revival—that I wrote with such enthusiasm about the last real English comedy of the nineteenth century, and yet these notes are three years old. Let the happy return of the play condone the reiteration of my impressions. Besides, they have lost none of their *raison d'être*. I felt not otherwise after the revival than upon the auspicious occasion of the arrival. If anything, I should be inclined to lavish more praise upon the play and the players, and if it were not futile I would pick a bone with those critics of Germany and Holland who have condemned the comedy of *Quex*. Foreign audiences have no conception of plays of modern English lite, because they have no actors to reproduce it. The manners of our cultured society are wonderful and unique. Our own players have trouble enough not to defile them ; how, then, should the foreigner, who stands on quite a different plane from the actor in England, catch the peculiarities which cannot be defined in the prompt book, but must instinctively be understood. And this reminds me that some weeks ago I was involuntarily unjust when I called Miss Genevieve Ward the only *grande dame* on our stage. I ought not to have forgotten Miss Fortescue, the inimitable Duchess of Strood, *carte d'or* of that high-bred world whose doings fill society columns and the Divorce Court. Nothing could be better than Miss Fortescue's refined nonchalance. She was the world, the flesh,

and the devil in a binding of exquisite taste. But nearly everybody has improved; Mr. John Hare, younger in appearance and gait, groomed with more care and refinement, now very nearly approaches the *beau idéal* of the modern dandy. If objections there are, they apply to his manner of speech, which is never unctuous and always caustic, and to his vociferation in the boudoir scene, which both he and Miss Irene Vanbrugh took too loudly. Surely, when in the midst of night a compromising scene is enacted in a strange house, the parties concerned would remember that a minor key is the alpha and omega of secrecy. Miss Vanbrugh's Sophy, too—fine as it always was—has ripened. I wager that Mr. Dion Boucicault has guided his gifted wife with one or two master-touches. What is particularly striking in the present performance is the distinction between veneer and vulgarity. As soon as Sophy is calm, she is pretty near—in fact but a cut below—the lady. But when an angry breeze agitates her, then out comes the Cockney with adulterated vowels and doubtful aitches. It is a splendid differentiation of the complex sides of the character. But nearly all were admirable—the Chicks of Mr. Gil' bert Hare, the early Victorian Dowager of Miss Fanny Coleman, the somewhat nervous but girlishly impressive Muriel of Miss Beatrice Forbes Robertson, the bumptious Bond Street soothsayer of Mr. A. Grenville.

To witness such a performance is a joy and a solace, for in it the high-water mark of acting is reached. And for the nonce we feel that in matters histrionic we are not always second fiddles in the European concert.

ST. JAMES'S THEATRE: "THE FINDING OF NANCY"

MISS NETTA SYRETT'S PRIZE PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

MAY 11, 1902

I

AFTER making a liberal allowance for the enthusiasm of an audience which had foregathered to witness the Playgoers' Club prize play, to swell the coffers of the Benevolent Fund, and to encourage the artists who gave their services, there remained sufficient spontaneity in the applause to call the production of *The Finding of Nancy* a happy event. It is, in candour, quite true enough that this selection out of 400 plays by, probably, ten different more or less competent judges does not decisively vindicate the case of the "Great Unacted." For if Miss Syrett's play is one of much promise, it is not quite good enough to establish the contention that a great many serviceable plays are going a-begging for want of an opportunity, provided always that *The Finding of Nancy* really surpassed its 399 rivals. But what the Playgoers' competition has proved beyond the shadow of a doubt is, that there is dramatic talent in our midst which could easily be developed if our theatres were not ruled by hide-bound principles of a long run, and if a frequent change of the programme would induce managers to be liberal towards newcomers. Under these circumstances Mr. Alexander's

experiment, for which he deserves a word of thanks and appreciation, may be called extremely useful. For now that Miss Syrett has had a hearing, she has been able to demonstrate by this single stroke that in a measurable space of time she may become a dramatist of consideration. She is singularly well equipped for a novice, and if it be true that *The Finding of Nancy* was written by way of mere recreation, then it must be conceded at once that nine points of the law are in her favour. The routine of the stage can be learned (and Miss Syrett has yet to learn it), but that which cannot be learned—the gift of dramatic instinct, the gift of writing dialogue, forcible and thoughtful, the gift of moulding characters, and not mere phonographic mannikins—that artistic trinity is so evident in this maiden effort that one is impatient to see the bud burst into flower.

II

One act worthy of a master and three acts something of a miss—that would be, in terse and somewhat caustic language, the summarised verdict on this play. The first act alone justifies the production, and so overwhelming is its superiority that it almost obliterates all that follows. Rarely has the lonesome life of the woman who fights the world single-handed, and ekes out some sort of an existence as a lady-typist on paltry wages, been so graphically, so humanly described. The woeful tale is told in all simplicity, the haze of despondency hangs over it all; it is as if a sorrowing soul had torn a leaf from her own life book and laid it before the world. We wonder at nothing and, if we are not narrow-minded, rebel against nothing; we sympathise with these terrible evenings of solitude, we feel the comforting sun-rays of male companionship that shed some light on her wilderness; we understand that, since the man, lawfully bound to a drunkard,

cannot offer marriage, the next thing is the natural consequence of two beings thrust together by fate and loneliness. The moralist may cavil at that, the men and women of the world will not. Such may not be life according to convention, but such is life by the unfathomable power of the inevitable. And Miss Syrett has told this episode with a feeling so true, so wholly sincere and spontaneous, that her characters grow upon us, that something more than curiosity and interest rivets us to the development of their career.

Four years elapse on the programme and we feel anxious. It may seem strange, but the practised playgoer has learned to fear these lapses of time. He knows the law of change, and when the first act has shown the beginning of a *liaison* and there are three acts to follow, he speculates on the possibilities in sight. Logically, the case of Nancy would have been either the usual cooling off or a perpetuation of the tie under stress of circumstances (a *collage* the French call it), or yet a marriage after the death of the lover's wife. Now, curiously enough, nothing of the kind happens, but the author sets us to face a new problem in the second act. After four years of real happiness, when the day has come when the lover can offer a legal union instead of free love, Nancy declares that she cannot marry him. She has found—after all these years—that her feelings were not those of love, for love did not awaken in her until some one else—a younger man—had crossed her path. Nor does Nancy defend this change on plausible grounds. She has not grown weary of her lover, as some women do, because the charm has worn off, or because they are tired of the duplicity, the enforced secrecy, the compromising nature of their union. She changes her mind—well, because she is a woman, and a woman of impulse.

There is no reasoning for or against this attitude. It is possible under some circumstances, if not under those presented in the play. Somehow our interest

lessens, the touch of originality has vanished, the story now begins to run on familiar lines. Mrs. Grundy seems to hover about, and hover she does until the end. For if it had been proved that Nancy had indeed not loved or had ceased to love her friend, she would have done that which happens every day—she would have married the new man, while the other party in course of time would have found consolation elsewhere. It is not, alas, an ideal state of things, but it is the truth. A foreign dramatist of the modern type would have thus terminated the conflict. But Miss Syrett, although she feels the right thorny path, does not choose to venture upon it. She employs a clever and effective *coup de theatre*—a misdirected telegram announcing an accident to somebody whom Nancy believes to be her lover—to show us that Nancy *did* love her old friend, and in the last act she brings them prettily together for evermore. Yes, that is the true solution as prescribed by the stage and the etiquette of Mrs. Grundy, who, poor dear! would have fainted if an *ex-maitresse* had married a (pure?) young officer. But is it true to nature? Is it beyond the rut of the commonplace of fiction? I do not pause to inquire. The outline of Nancy's character, the fact that she was for four years a happy wife without the law, gives the reply. And in that reply lies the reason why Miss Syrett's play, charmingly written in parts, poignant at moments, altogether far above *matinée* fare, and many, many plays of lengthy careers, is not a mature creation. Still, as a first essay in playwriting it is admirable, and as it gave, moreover, a splendid opportunity to two young actresses, Miss Lilian Braithwaite, altogether lovable, womanly, and quite touching in the pathetic scenes, and Miss Madge McIntosh, powerful in her restraint and subdued sorrows of life, to advance by leaps and bounds, the production of *The Finding of Nancy* will be remembered in the chronicles of our modern stage.

PRINCE OF WALES' THEATRE : "THERE AND BACK "

A FARCE IN THREE ACTS, BY GEORGE ARLISS

MAY 25, 1902

I

MOST actors commit plays sometime in their lifetime, and Mr. George Arliss is no exception to the rule. Nor does his play occupy a unique position. It is an actor's play, which is synonymous with saying that it may be effective, but that it is neither good nor original.

Lest somebody tells me that Mr. Pinero was an actor, that Mr. Stephen Phillips was, to say nothing of Molière and even greater immortals of earlier days, let me forestall such objections by informing them that "actor's play" is a theatrical term familiar in Continental stageland. It implies that the thing is a work of craft and nowise a work of art. It implies that the compiler has successfully observed the moods and manners of his master—as gentlemen's gentlemen often grow familiar with gentlemanly ways. It implies (besides an excellent memory) a certain skill in construction, an effort to provide actors with succulent parts and a great intensity in belying the old adage that the unexpected always happens. In actors' plays it is the other way ; that is why they are safe. Convention is the gilt-edged security of human contentment.

II

Mr. Arliss's play will amuse most people in general and some in particular. The last fraction had better skip two acts and come in during the third, which is not only the best of the play, but far from bad as it stands. In this respect the actor-author deserves a compliment. He is not stunningly amusing while he jumbles his tangle. Soon after the inter-marriage of Adam's seven sons and seven daughters the quirk must have been invented of husbands haunted by pre-nuptial Marie Antoinette Smiths, and thereby diverted from an honest journey of recreation into a concealed destination, whither by the aid of the pincers of coincidence everybody and the wives are dragged to make matters "hum." But where Mr. Arliss goes one better than his myriads of predecessors is in the third act, when the "Ananiades" of the husbands reach their climax. The culprits then tell a long rigmarole of imaginary nautical adventures, and as Mr. Hawtrey is the narrator-in-chief, success would be sure even if the author had done his work indifferently. But, for the nonce, Mr. Arliss's tale was even more amusing than Mr. Hawtrey's telling. Anon when Mr. Arliss sends plays off his own bat and breaks with "reminiscing," and all the associations of actors' plays, his vein of humour will promise something very amusing. For it is there, and in the laughable concoction of a wildly fantastic shipwreck story there was many a line and a thought of a peculiarly original mould. The unravelling, too, of the plot was not badly done, for although nothing remarkable happened, it was just amusing enough to keep the public calmly in their seats instead of provoking the usual rustle of skirts and clicks of opera hats.

III

Farces must flit across the planks of the stage like wildfire, and that particular velocity is not much in evidence in our theatres—certainly not on first nights. On these occasions everybody is mortified by nervousness, and under this stress they shout all at once and worry the furniture as if the stools and the tables, poor things, could help it that the *ensemble* does not work to perfection. Mr. Hawtrey himself is not a very good first-nighter, and talks a little text of his own—always diverting, but not always apposite, while Mr. Arthur Williams, ever himself with a vengeance, seems to be still rehearsing his effects. Fortunately both actors exercise a gay fascination on their audience. Mr. Arthur Playfair, on the other hand, is quite ready when the play is on its trial trip. He, like Mr. Hawtrey, believes in the stolid, inert exhibition of humour. He makes no violent efforts to be funny, and he succeeds in being so. I am no judge of Scotch lairds, but I am told that the type was neatly hit off, and that the accent, though slightly deteriorated by London wear, was worthy of the canny race. Miss Beatrice Ferrar as the Marie Antoinette was as little suited to her part as she was to Marie Antoinette's *alter ego*, the Girl from Maxim's. Miss Ferrar's laboured method of displaying devil-may-care agility is (as they say in America) dangerously near "striking twelve." Her palette is in need of fresh colours. The Misses Helen Macbeth and Henrietta Watson are both pleasant personalities on the stage, but they are not always comédiennes. The touch of lightness is wanting, and in Miss Macbeth's make-up the touch wants lightening. She always wears the woeful expression of a "black eye."

"There and Back," play and acting, forms an entertainment of an ephemeral kind. It is good enough to live awhile, but not strong enough to last.

SHAFTESBURY: "THE GRASS WIDOW"

A FARCE IN THREE ACTS, BY MADELINE LUCETTE
RILEY

JUNE 8, 1902

I

Axiom No. 1.—A farce ceases to be farcical, yet becomes "a farce" when it is not amusing.

Axiom No. 2.—A farce must be as clear as crystal when it starts. In everyday parlance, we must know whither the author is driving. Never mind the imbroglios that follow ; they may bewilder, yet they will amuse us, provided that we listeners know where we are at the outset. Sarcey, who was the critic *par excellence* of this species of playwriting, never ceased to preach "My children, be clear when you start, and then *vogue la galère*." The pre-eminence of French farce-comedies prompted him to formulate his time-proof doctrine : the drama is the art of preparation.

Axiom No. 3.—The chief characteristic of farce is the arrangement of ludicrous situations. Dialogue is of minor importance. The most famous farces of the modern world have been distinguished by the artless *naïveté* of their dialogue. They were written neither gracefully nor wittily. But the talk was strictly apposite.

Axiom No. 4.—As the heart is the central point of human vitality, so the second act is the vital point of a

vital farce. If the first act be tame but explicit, if the third act be lame, there is no harm, so long as the second act is strong. The intermezzo has made many a facile opera besides *Cavalleria*. Intermezzo—that is the second act, the thing 'twixt entrée and dessert—is the making of a pleasurable farce.

II

There is many a slip, but only one step, between theory and practice. The slip, I regret to say, is Mrs. Ryley's, for her play will not do, and the step is mine. I can take it lightly, for having prepared my article with axioms, I need not overlay it with tedious amplifications. Let it suffice for you and myself that Mrs. Ryley in her *Grass Widow* offends against nearly every article of the code which I have compiled for the benefit of playwrights (and for my own amusement). I owe gratitude to Mrs. Ryley for the pleasant evenings of *Jedbury Junior*, of *An American Citizen*, and of *Mice and Men*. I have always felt that she knew how to blend humour with a nice substratum of sentiment. But, diving into memories, I also remember that when Mrs. Ryley attempted humour unaided by a pathetic touch, she failed to conquer the good grace of our smiles. In *The Mysterious Mr. Bugle*, as in this somewhat sere and yellow *Grass Widow*, we discovered soon enough that by profession or by instinct Mrs. Ryley is not a humorist but a sentimentalist. I fancy that she is really always *au sérieux*, and that it costs her an immense effort to broaden a casual smile into a lasting guffaw. If the theme of *The Grass Widow*—the marriage of convenience contracted in childhood, childishness, and (probably) undisturbed virginity—had been told in earnest, not in a topsy-turvy manner to provoke laughter, the play would have been pretty and fascinating. But, turned into the impossible,

interlarded with Parisian tit-bits, with comic cuts from Meilhac, with portal devices of French farce, with satire on duels (not quite original since Messrs. Rubens and Harold Ellis wrote that clever scene in *Young Mr. Yarde*), to say nothing of freaks à la Ugo Biondi, Fregoli, and other gay deceivers in the clothes line, the story of the *Grass Widow* becomes somewhat soporiferous. After all, the practised playgoer, patient though he be, grows weary of discovering the time-worn "novelties" shed upon us, season after season, by the sun which illuminates the stage.

Perhaps one would be more indulgent to the indifferent farce of a clever writer if it were defended in a more efficient manner. But the leading actor, Mr. Paul Arthur, should really go in quest of freshness—forget himself for the sake of the play—try to infuse individuality into his parts, and—if "gag" he must—say things which are funny. Mr. Arthur is always Mr. Arthur, a gratifying fact, no doubt, to his friends and admirers, but in a play we want something more; we want an actor who is not himself but "the other fellow." In fine, Mr. Arthur should take more trouble to chasten, to develop, to subordinate to the ensemble the parts which he is called upon to play. He "stars" all the time—*l'état c'est moi* seems to be his motto—but the Solar King did radiate by right of personality, not merely by right of supersession. To say that Miss Grace Lane is not quite at home in farce is to pay her a compliment. She stands on a higher plane. She cannot make gold out of tinsel, and so we are content to enjoy her comedy presence while wishing for a better opportunity. Among all the others some tried to be funny and were not (maybe the parts were to blame), while others generated fun beyond the tenor of the dialogue. This refers especially to Mr. Cosmo Stuart, who, as a French wine-traveller, had few humorous words to say, but said them so caustically that we regretted the paucity of his opportunities.

GARRICK THEATRE: "FRANCESCA DA RIMINI"

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS, BY F. MARION CRAWFORD,
TRANSLATED INTO FRENCH BY MARCEL SCHWAB

JUNE 15, 1902

I

IN his dedication to Madame Sarah Bernhardt, Mr. Marion Crawford rejoices in that after six hundred years the artist has reincarnated Francesca's soul: "*Che piange e dice.*"

In these words of exuberant gratitude and of poetic licence Mr. Crawford has, as it were, struck the keynote of the inevitable criticism challenged by closer intimacy with the play.

For the paramount impression left behind is that if this Francesca is certainly not the Francesca of the legend, she is also not the mediæval figure of haze-dimmed history. Francesca da Rimini could not have felt, nor sorrowed, nor spoken like this loquacious melodramatic heroine. She wears the clothes of the period, but the soul is of our times. Robe her in the twentieth-century fashions of Maëstro Doucet or of la Helbronner, and the renaissance of Florence and of Rimini vanishes to make room for a prismatic personality of none too ancient lineage. For La Dame aux Camélias, her extreme ancestor, and her sisters in France are legion.

It saves a great deal of trouble and fruitless explanation thus to strike at the heart of the play. It demonstrates the nature of the work, while at the same time it obviates the necessity of drawing lengthy comparisons between the character as it lives in our mind and the figure resuscitated in a more or less historical manner by Mr. Marion Crawford. Francesca, the woman of thirty-two, who for fourteen long years has been the mistress of her husband's brother—himself a married man—is no kinswoman of the delicate creature who, in childish innocence, sat in the moon-lit rose-garden studying the romance of Lancelot and Guinevere with her boy lover. Her love is but adorned by wealth of words, but its base is carnal—sensual to such a degree that the tragedy no longer concentrates in her, but in the mis-shapen husband, whose unrequited devotion is an elegy of martyrdom. Giovanni Malatesta alone commands our sympathy. He stands aloof from and far above the sordid tale of infidelity of which he is a victim, because the ugliness of his body overwhelms the fairer nature of his soul.

II

In depoetising the tale Mr. Crawford has to some extent enhanced its poignancy. The new *Francesca* is a strong drama of rugged features. It reveals the unmistakable gift of creating strong situations. If it is true that this play is a maiden effort, it is remarkable for the mastery of its workmanship. The structure is almost Sardouesque in its dexterity and daring. There are effects, as in the first encounter between Francesca and Giovanni in the dimmed bridal room; the confronting of Paolo with the lifeless body of his wife; the minute examination of Francesca when the broken tryst is discovered—which might have been contrived by Sardou himself. These scenes are thrilling, if only

for a moment. For one feels all the time that the conflicts are not real; they are manufactured for a purpose. There is no soul in all these long protestations of love, these imprecations, these soliloquies and declamations. They belong to the domain of melodrama. Effect is the aim of it all, and thus, if now and again the hearer resents a shock—an assault upon his nerves—he feels no emotion, no appeal to his inner being. And it is all very long and very verbose, and it leaves little behind it. One goes home none the richer for it all. There remains nothing to think over, nothing to discuss. It was an interesting spectacle, vivified by excellent acting, but that is all.

III

Sarah Bernhardt is a marvel. The days go by but her years seem to decrease. She is younger than ever, and now that once more robes flow around her regal figure she is more fascinating than ever. The voice, too, has regained the mellowness of her palmiest days. Verily as an artist she may proudly exclaim with Charles V., "My sun never sets." Nor does it rise to newer glories. It is ever the same method. Organ tones, organ tones, now languorous, then thunderous, but organ-tones all the time. The cadence is as regular as clockwork. She breathes love, she roars hatred, she clamours passion. It is very beautiful, but too much familiarity with it makes one critical. Would one care to live for ever in an atmosphere of hymns and tempestuous hallelujahs? Sometimes—at very infrequent moments—Sarah Bernhardt abandons incantation and vehemence, speaks naturally, unaffectedly, without effort, and then, when she is merely a living mortal with a voice of birdlike suavity, she is, in my eyes, at her greatest. It is, perhaps, for this reason that I saw in her Francesca nothing mediæval, that I found it merely a revised

edition of *La Dame aux Camélias* ; a splendid picture of amorousness, but modern to the core ; a masterpiece of acting, but not a creation so vital, so spontaneous, that it would stir our soul or quicken the beat of our hearts. As in the play so in its interpretation our sympathies were most deeply moved by the Giovanni of Mr. de Max, that remarkable actor of Roumanian birth, whose service under Antoine has taught him to perfection to wed demeanour to his words. For us of the cooler climate and the duller skies, there may be a semblance of too much emphasis in the manner of this Giovanni, whose countenance revealed every phase of the struggle within. But even that did not mar his conquest. Mr. de Max struck the note of tragedy—he, and he alone, reincarnated the period of the play—and so striking was the victory of this artist, who spared nothing to emphasise the deformity of the “stroppiato,” that the audience again and again singled out his name for vociferous acclamation.

COMEDY THEATRE: "THE LORD OF HIS HOUSE"

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS, BY GEORGE HAWTREY

JUNE 15, 1902

WHEN girls talk nicely about girls, which is oftener the case than women care to admit, one often hears the summing-up: "Isn't she a dear?"—a brief exclamation, which tells a tale in one single term of endearment. It means, I take it, that the young lady *sub judice* is of winsome appearance, has charm of manner, shows kindness of heart, reveals some intelligence, with a decided leaning towards the ideal, is, in fine, an agreeable companion—neither striking nor peerless, but a comforter in bright days and in black.

Would that I might sometimes deliver my criticism of plays in the mono-phrases of daily life, which convey so much in one brief breath. Take, for instance, this unpretentious play of Mr. George Hawtreys; there is really no more to be said about it than "Isn't it a dear?"—it is just that, and nothing more nor less. Of course I might amplify and tell the story—everyday story of a phlegmatic husband and impulsive wife, of a former admirer's appearance and the usual consequences; of the husband's timely "bucking-up" and the wife's compromising scrap of paper destroyed unread by her lord's chivalrous hands. But that would not alter the case nor seem quite fair to the author.

For if he tells us nothing new, he does it in a manner which is quite fresh, quite charming, and sometimes so natural that one sees people nodding to one another in a spirit of intelligence which indicates "We know all about that." There is particularly a little love scene in the third act, played with feeling by Miss Mab Paul, and with splendid *verve* by that very promising young comedian Mr. R. C. Hertz, which might happen every day. Mrs. Calvert, in the character of a meddling, gossiping, match-making old lady, lies asleep in the drawing-room after dinner. Mrs. Calvert asleep is as eloquent a picture as when she, admirable actress, talks with the preciseness and point of the older (and better) school of acting. While the old lady snores and the hostess feigns forty winks, the young couple sit on the sofa talking sweet nothings. Of course the match is objected to, and the sleeper would have prevented it at any cost. But lovers and babies are watched over by kindly fates, and so it happens that the question is popped and the seals are affixed between the intervals of the mother's slumbers and starts. When she awakes, having "of course heard everything"—except the cooing and the kisses—the lovers make bland faces and the young man retires, with formal valedictions and a jubilant tongue in his cheek.

This dainty episode pleased the house perhaps more than anything in the two hours' entertainment; but there were other moments which evoked a good deal of quiet enjoyment. The fact is that Mr. George Hawtrey has succeeded where so many fail. He has written a real comedy, somewhat conventional, perhaps, not destined to set the Thames on fire, but a thing that will rock the audience in what the French so aptly call *le bien-être*.

The Lord of His House was acted in the same spirit of cosiness in which it was written. Some of the players I have already named. There remain to be

mentioned the "third party," neatly and discreetly impersonated by Mr. Edward O'Neill; the wife, played with delicate humour and delicate feeling, as is her wont, by Miss Nina Boucicault; and last, but not least, the husband, who could not have been entrusted to better hands than Mr. Fred Kerr. Mr. Kerr's phlegm has become a proverbial thing, like Mr. Hawtrey's "veracity." It is quite inimitable in its way, and so essentially manly in the true British sense of the word that one longs to see Mr. Kerr in the character of a soldier. He should be admirable. Perhaps Captain Marshall will remember him when he writes his next play of military life.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE: REVIVAL OF "THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR"

JUNE 15, 1902

THE revival of the *Merry Wives* is welcome on account of the players, not of the play. It is best to accept the tradition that Shakespeare wrote this farce by royal command in a fortnight. As a work of art it stands almost on the level of the effusions of our poets laureate whenever the arrival of a royal baby forces the official lyre into joyous chords. Nowadays the gallery would, perhaps, "bait" the author at the end of the performance; but tradition makes the crowd reverential, and so we have learned to accept the Shakespearean *Charley's Aunt* business (Act III.) with composure; and if the acting is but up to the mark, we may yet indulge in a good post-prandial laugh at the expense of the burly wine-bag so handsomely befooled by woman's wit.

Moreover, in expectation of the revelries of a period of peace and pageants, it seems befitting that one of the first theatres of London should remember our greatest dramatist in his most festive mood. The *Merry Wives* is essentially food for the crowd. The compass of the play is elastic, and the more tomfoolery you add to its rugged mirth, the merrier will be the carnival on both sides of the house. And then there was Mr. Tree's brilliant idea of engaging the two most

popular and most renowned actresses of our stage to join him in a trio. That alone would give the play a fillip of singular force, and it is no exaggeration to say that the evening of June 10, 1902, will be a date of some importance in stage history.

Mr. Tree's own excellent conception of Falstaff is an old friend. Now, as in the past, the most interesting feature of it is that Mr. Tree so perfectly sinks his personality into the bulk of padding and raises his voice to the bibulous bark of the curious cavalier. For *finesse* of diction there is little occasion, for the part requires more physical than mental exertion; but Mr. Tree sends forth a few witty sallies with a nice sly humour, and withal there is so much infantile good nature that one grows to like this wicked old Falstaff as the little ones like good old Santa Claus.

Like Paris in his apple quandary, I feel sorely puzzled as to whom to offer my palm of compliments—to Mrs. Kendal, the ingenious Mistress Ford, or to Miss Ellen Terry, the no less arch Mistress Page. Both were admirable, both deserved the outburst of cheers which greeted them, *avant, pendant, et après*. It may, however, be said that our generation has never seen a Mistress Ford so ingenious, so full of feminine acuteness, of consummate manners and unflagging *verve* as Mrs. Kendal, nor a Mistress Page so picturesque, so winsome and so jovial as Miss Ellen Terry. There is a third lady who should be mentioned in this same strain. I mean Miss Zeffie Tilbury, the Mistress Quickly, not merely in name, but in deed. She is one of the few younger actresses who knows how to laugh on the stage; and so merrily does she peal that the audience is carried away, laughs too, and is ever glad to see that bonnie little mask saunter across the floor. Mr. Kemble was a very fine, portly and humorous Caius, and his French was better than it is usually made in London. Mr. Oscar Asche's Ford, well known from Bensonian days, has become more

melodramatic, which is no improvement to an otherwise robust and well planned performance. Many other artists of repute, above all Mrs. Tree, Mr. Lionel Brough, Mr. Gerald Lawrence, and Mr. Charles Quartermain, lent splendid assistance in a very efficient *ensemble*; and Mr. Tree mounted the play with that splendour of scenery and that delicate poetic touch which have rendered his Shakespearean revivals so attractive. Nothing better has been seen at His Majesty's than this spirited performance of the *Merry Wives*.

SHAFTESBURY THEATRE : REVIVAL OF "JEDBURY JUNIOR "

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY MADELEINE LUCETTE
RYLEY.

JUNE 22, 1902

THE manager of the Shaftesbury Theatre has adopted a commercial principle which is no less potent on the stage than elsewhere. He has understood how to cut his loss. *The Grass Widow* failed to attract, and after five nights overboard she went. But acting in a gracious spirit towards the clever authoress, who must have felt her disappointment keenly, the manager gave her an opportunity to wipe out the "regrettable incident" by a new victory with ancient weapons. Once more *Jedbury Junior*, the play in which Mrs. Ryley made her first bow to London, is on the boards, and once again the public took kindly, even cordially, to the quaint mixture of wild farce and comedy of delicate sentiment.

Between this work and the latter-day *Mice and Men* there is unmistakable affinity, yet a remarkable difference. *Jedbury* is the bold effort of a novice; *Mice and Men* is the accomplishment of an experienced hand. The former is tentative, the latter definite, in plan and execution. A more amateurish first act, a more wildly fantastic *donnée* than young Jedbury's marriage of improbable necessity in the West Indies is hardly conceivable. A wise man is he who could make head

or tail of so curious a story. And until well into the second act things drifted aimlessly in the doldrums of none too hilarious farce. But towards the end of that second section there was an awakening. Suddenly Mrs. Ryley grew serious, a charming scene between young Jedbury and his sweetheart—who unconsciously happens to be his West Indian wife—promised interesting developments. The boobyish boy showed signs of being made of virile stuff. It was quite touching to see the rich man's son migrating into the wide world to build up a new life in his father's firm as a mere clerk. In the third act there came the fine scene between the fraudulent manager and Jedbury Junior, now (as before) capitally acted, but this time by Mr. Wilton Heriot, who has the gift of characterisation, and Mr. Frank Worthing, about whom more anon. That scene made the play and still lingered in our memory, while all other details of the plot were forgotten. Our public likes a sterling exhibition of virility, and Mrs. Ryley had handled the scene so deftly that it made more than a passing impression. Perhaps it was so because most of our colonial prosperity is due to the will-power and the stubborn sense of duty of the young generation. At any rate, the third act was the cause of a very favourable reception, and such favourable comment that Mrs. Ryley's work began to attract attention.

Under these circumstances the revival was welcome, albeit that the acting in general fell a good deal below the level of former excellence. It is undeniable that the tradition of a character is established by its first impersonation, and it is equally patent that such tradition is mostly indelible. To us regular playgoers Mr. Frederick Kerr was Jedbury Junior, and as this artist has a style all his own, every newcomer must needs suffer the penalty of comparison. But even were it otherwise, I think the play would have fared less well if Mr. Frank Worthing had originally filled the part. Mr. Worthing is an actor in great earnest, of some

power, and he has learned a good deal in America and unlearned just a little of that over-emphasis which marred his earlier efforts. But he is still a very nervous player, betraying agony on the first night, and one whose sense of humour is dulled by the graveness of his manner. This implies that he was not the man for the part, and that he fought—bravely—against adverse conditions. He had, however, one splendid opportunity in the third act, and, as mentioned incidentally, he made the most of it. We now await anxiously to see what he will achieve when sterner stuff is entrusted to him. Quite admirable again was Mr. Cosmo Stuart, who only a fortnight ago won golden opinions in *The Grass Widow*. Mr. Stuart brings to every part refinement of manner, a touch of originality, and an evident amount of study, all too rare among young actors. He has but one word to say in the play—that word is “Hooray”—but for the rest he has to pose volumes of dialogue with a placid countenance and silent lips. He does it admirably. He raises a “thinking” part to the height of virtuosity. Another most interesting performance was the young heroine of Miss Grace Lane, who had stepped into the shoes of Miss Maud Millett. If I had to summarise Miss Lane’s art I would call her a “Kendalette.” She does not imitate the great actress, but she has learned so much from her, her half-averted positions, the motion of her arms, her arch smile and comely manner, above all, her fine, precise, pointed diction, that one seems to be witnessing the acting of a younger sister. Gradually, no doubt, Miss Lane’s own personality will overcome these salient features of her training, but as she is still young and in her novitiate, it is pleasing to behold what a promising disciple Mrs. Kendal has formed. Single-handed, Mrs. Kendal could fulfil the mission of an academy—and that distinction is fairly unique.

WYNDHAM'S THEATRE: "THE HEDONISTS"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY MRS. G. C. ASHTON
JONSON.

JUNE 6, 1902

I

SUPPOSE that you are my friend and that we harbour true affection for one another. Suppose that circumstances beyond our control cause us to drift asunder and accidentally stop all intercourse. Is that a valid ground upon which to rend the web of affection for ever, when neither the malediction of any foe, nor, worse, our own fault in criticising our absent friend too freely, has been brought into play? I say "No." Mrs. Ashton Jonson says "Yes" in her interesting experiment of *The Hedonists*. And here I find one insuperable difficulty in accepting the ethics of the play, although it is not the only one.

If Colin Sinclair on his return from West Africa had acted like every ordinary human being whose whole heart and soul are wrapped up in love for the one woman of all women, he would have rushed into the arms of his beloved Marcia, the dancer. And he would have said, "Here I am back, as much your own as when I went," and all would have been well. But Colin does not do that; he lingers; gossip announces his return to the girl; and when at length he meets

her, she has struck, in an hour of dire distress, an ignoble bargain with the Hedonist, the Nabob of pleasure, and he finds a stranger. For another woman, a rival in love, who hopes that a speedy death of her bedridden husband would wed her to Colin, had burned the letter in which he, before his sudden mission to Africa, had vowed eternal faith to Marcia. Dramatically all this is plausible enough ; the playgoer who does not reflect will accept it, but logic does not allow it to pass. It is a clever position, but it is untenable. Then comes the next disputable ethical point. The Hedonist, taking advantage of Colin's absence, which he himself has contrived, longs for Marcia with all the fervour of his animal passion. He will pay any price except the one of lifelong bondage. He knows the character of the girl—a proud, a haughty, a snow-white soul—he knows also that her resources are drained and that the wolf beleaguers her father's door. Now, would he, man of the world, eminent financier, skilful tactician, brutally thrust into her face a degrading proposal of maintenance in shame ? Or would he play the game of the thin end of the wedge, and proffer gentle help with ulterior motives ? . . .

Third and last point. When Colin meets Marcia, and has induced her to speak and to listen, what does he hear ? She says : "I have closed a shameful contract, I have sold myself." Whereupon he, the man who in the first act had so sternly repulsed the other woman, and had spoken such brave words of manliness that their vigour seemed to border on harshness, withdraws like a snail. Yet she had not said that she had fulfilled the contract, and one crucial question would have brought light. Surely when a man stands face to face with the woman he adores, he does not accept a mere statement which may mean all or nothing. He would insist, he would demand explanations before throwing up his life's happiness. There would be an opening for a great scene, of effusion,

of convincing arguments, of re-union, instead of a lame fourth act, conventional to a degree, and ruinous to a play above the common level.

II

Instead of meandering in the by-ways of criticism as to construction and lesser faults, I have chosen to deal with the ethics of the play, because they are vital in the work of an author who is ambitious to break away from the old school. And in applying to these ethics the touchstone of logical possibilities in real life I have, I hope, clearly marked the difference between the two schools, the artificial one of yesterday and the realistic one of to-day. The former creates situations for the sake of theatricality; the latter scorns artifice and goes straight ahead, regardless of so-called situations, but mindful of correct characterisation. Now, in Mrs. Jonson's play there reigns a strange duality. On the one hand, in its conception and in the evolution of the story, it is distinctly old-fashioned. It leans on Sardouesque scraps of paper, coincidences, and such like, wherefore the characters sometimes fail to do what they would under normal (that is unartificial) circumstances. But, on the other hand, it is written in a style essentially modern. There is no flummery, no steeple-chasing after epigrammatic tinsel, no cheap sentimentality. Clear and limpid as water from the rocks runs the dialogue; here and there a brilliant flash of wit scintillates agreeably; now and then a true word, straight from the heart, deepens the tone. In fine, it is a well-written play; it will read as agreeably as it sounds; it is an effort in that right direction where the language of the stage echoes the spontaneous utterance from human lips. These merits are of no mean value, and as Mrs. Jonson proves herself to be not merely a good writer but also the possessor of the rare gift, which

the French so aptly call *le don du théâtre*, she may be cordially encouraged to persevere. And, if it be a solace, let me sum up my opinion that on the whole it is at least as promising as, and of more accomplished workmanship than, Miss Syrett's effort, which was its rival.

III

I have still more to say in defence of this new dramatist. Her play has not, as yet, obtained a fair hearing. Not that the appreciative audience was at fault, but the actors were, with few exceptions, insufficient. There were good intentions all along the line, but the task overtaxed the majority of the players. The success of the afternoon was, indeed, achieved by one who played almost the smallest part; I refer to the cockney landlady played by Miss Addie Boyne. That was an admirable performance, and in one stroke revealed an actress. She gave the good, common, aitchless woman of the people to the life; it was as real as anything that a day before had filled me with joy and reflection at the Southwark County Court, where the hospitality of the genial and humane judge allowed me to witness a session every whit "as good as a play." Next to Miss Boyne the honours were carried by Mr. Charles Goodhart, who has never done anything better in all his career than Rosenstein, the financier. It was an impersonation in the fullest sense of the word. In his bluff, humorous, unaffected manner—a film of veneer hiding the coarse ground-floor of a nature purely animal—Mr. Goodhart portrayed the Hedonist to perfection. He reminded me of Oscar Asche's Maldonado, the parts and the playing were akin. Charming as an *ingénue* was Miss Elizabeth Kirby, and the same would apply to Miss Dora Barton in a similar kind of part. But oh! if she would only forsake those affected guttural inflections of the voice and forget her audience.

In the leading characters of Marcia and Colin, Mrs. Arthur Scaife and Mr. Gerald Gurney had both good moments. The actress was excellent in scenes of silent despair and quiet sorrow ; Mr. Gurney was at his best in the strongest scenes. But both artists lacked something ; the one of convincing pathos, and the other of that magnetism which carries an audience away. Marcia was not the ethereal kind of personality imagined by the authoress ; Colin, notably in the first two acts, was too prosy for the hero of an all-absorbing romance. And, as the drama virtually hinges on the convincing power of these two characters, it is but fair to the authoress to bear in mind that if the play is the thing, so is the playing.

BEN JONSON'S "ALCHEMIST"

JULY 13, 1902

WHEN I listen to these old comedy-writers I blush to the roots of my hair. Not that I feel shocked by the ruggedness of their humour, for I have a splendid digestion for mental strong meat of all kinds, only insidious condiments of indefinite savour (*double-entendre*) disagree with me; and the old humorists were nothing if not straightforward. But I blush a little on my own behalf, and a little more by proxy for the sake of our modern playwrights, when I contemplate our intellectual poverty, despite our much-vaunted progress in education. These older men, many of them rough diamonds at the start and polished by the whirl of time, had much scantier opportunity to see the world at large than ourselves, but their horizon was far less limited. Their learning, derived from lips rather than from books, and if from books then from such as have instructed all ages, was less universal and scholastically pedantic than ours, but it led to far more generous results. These old writers—the last of whom was Sheridan—had intuition; a humour all their own; a vocabulary as rich as it was audacious. In form their work may now seem somewhat naïve, for the exigencies of stage-craft have, outwardly, undergone a change. But, inherently, what force, what boundless flow of satire, what exhaustless humour in paraphrasing the

same phrase over and over again without palling or languor. And, most remarkable thing of all, many of these comedies, hundreds of years old, are to-day as fresh, as applicable, as vital (save in texture) as they were at their birth. Take *The Alchemist*, a persiflage of the gold craze, when human greed to convert baser metal into gold, superseded all principles of morality and decorum—is it not as much of our time as of the ages which we like to describe and to decry as dark? As I sat and listened with the ardour of a disciple—for it is many years since I read my Ben Jonson—yet even more kindled by wonderment and joy, I transposed the situations from 1609 to 1902. I thought of the modern alchemists who “salt” mines and deceive the world while trading on its cupidity. I thought of the Bond-street soothsayers with their pretence of occult science and clairvoyance, who engender other people’s hallucinations while tricking them of their gold. I thought of company promoting—marriage brokerage, of all the thousand and one traps and snares laid for the purses of *mundus vult decipi*, and every new thought enhanced my admiration for Ben Jonson. In his *Alchemist* he has set two worlds by the ears—the world of birds of prey and their quarry. But what interested me even more than the shrewdness of the play was the opulence of its language. The words literally ripple from the author’s pen, and so manifold, so multi-coloured is his diction that the average hearer is sadly in need of a lexicon to understand the meaning of it all. For, truth to tell, we are sorry laggards in the knowledge of our unrivalled language, and those who speak it to us from the boards are as slenderly equipped as the hearers. We have but to compare the mode of expression of the best of our modern writers to the unforced volubility of the elders. The former use a vocabulary of definite limitations, the latter in their abundance presage infinite possibilities.

II

The Elizabethan Stage Society and their valiant sponsors, Messrs. William Poel and Ben Greet, need not grieve that when their performances are offered to the general public there is less stir than on the occasion of ordinary *premières*. Nor need they deplore the aloofness of society and fashionable *littérateurs*. Neither lend importance to a production, and their presence is nowise evidence of artistic quality. Shakespeare, before he was "over-decorated," meant ruin; Ibsen still enjoys abuse and short-lived performances; Wagner, until well in the nineties, was a negligible quantity. Yet all three have made strides in universal favour and history, notwithstanding recalcitrant London. The same applies to Mr. Poel's creation. Since his work has improved—for it was not always good—it has taken rank among the artistic movements of Europe. We, over here, are perhaps least conscious of it, but abroad the Elizabethans are as constantly observed as the Theatre Antoine of Paris and the Secessionists of Berlin. That we shall slowly follow suit is evident since the production of *Everyman*, and I consider it a pity that *The Alchemist* was allowed but two nights' grace. For, as a performance, it was as nearly perfect as can be expected from a band of players recruited here and there to represent a comedy demanding inordinate faculties of memory, of glibness of tongue, and of humorous instinct. To say that all parts were well filled would be exaggeration, but, on the whole, there was a rare display of harmony, except in the opening scene, which in its verbal profusion and bustle defied the lips and the limbs of the actors. Evidently, by the constellation of their performance, the Elizabethans desire to discourage personal laudations. Yet I cannot refrain from singling out the *Alchemist*, Mr. Lewis Mannering, "subtle" not only in

name, but in quality of speech, manner, and Anglo-foreign suppleness; Mr. Percy Anstey, quite remarkable in his differentiation of the quack's meek assistant and the dashing would-be soldier; Miss Edith Ashby, pert as the maid, exquisitely mannered as the pseudo-Duchess; Mr. Paul Berton, a cavalier with *panache*; and Mr. B. A. Field (Drugger, the tobacco-man), who is best characterised as a well-nigh ideal Wagner in Goethe's *Faust*. These artists and several of their henchmen, whose names I failed to detect, played with great zest to the delight of their scant but enthusiastic audience. And as I watched this good work I could not help thinking that, in default of an Academy, there was no better stepping-stone for ambitious actors than the Elizabethan Stage Society.

THE DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE :

"THE MARRIAGE OF KITTY"

AUGUST 30, 1902

I

IN French the play is called *La Passerelle*, in English *The Marriage of Kitty*. The two titles mark the difference to a nicety.

Literally, *La Passerelle* means the little railway bridge 'twixt the up and down platforms ; metaphorically, but in no flattering sense, it refers to a woman who has been coaxed into a kind of transitory marriage of convenience, in order to fulfil the conditions of a will. For the *pro formâ* husband would have lost his uncle's fortune if he had married a widow or the Peruvian lady of whom he is enamoured. The position is awkward, but the family solicitor knows the way out of it. He has a fair ward on his hands who is sorely in need of a living, and to her, marriage—albeit, merely in name and *pro tem.*—is salvation. She accepts, and as she goes through the farcical form she decides firmly to win her husband's heart while gently clinging to his hand.

Whether in England such a game of collusion, aided and abetted, forsooth, by a solicitor, would pass muster before the Court of Sir Francis Jeune, the Queen's Proctor, and the Incorporated Law Society, I will leave undiscussed. Nor need one pause to inquire into other

legal delicacies connected with the peculiar case of Kitty's nominal matrimony. For this is farcical comedy, and in that benighted region the improbable is acceptable provided that it is amusing. Now, to a great extent the play, which Mr. Cosmo Gordon Lennox has distilled with infinite pains out of very slippery French material, is highly entertaining. And if the third act were but a pointed end to a good story, the whole evening would have been one of boundless merriment; but unfortunately after the second act, which culminates in the climax of "he fell in love with his wife," there is no more to be said. We are absorbed in Kitty and her husband; what becomes of her hysterical Peruvian rival does not interest us; and to devote a whole act to needless explanation and disentanglement is like spoiling the effect of an excellent champagne dinner by a wanton surfeit of whisky and soda. Nor do I see how Mr. Lennox can mend matters except by vigorous pruning. The act is superfluous, and the more it is reduced the better it will be for the ultimate success of the play.

After this objection, which applies to many farcical comedies, Mr. Lennox may be complimented on having done his difficult task with much skill and taste. Strictly speaking, the drift of the play is towards thin ice and shallow waters, but Mr. Lennox has so neatly veneered all that might offend Mrs. Grundy, he has made the problem of the wife's conquest so attractive, that one forgives all undercurrents for the sake of the pretty wit that rules supreme.

II

The Marriage of Kitty is one of those plays which are made or marred by an actress. It will be a great success because Miss Marie Tempest has grasped every phase of the part and has endowed it with all the captiva-

tion of her personality and intellect. She is loyally supported and stimulated by Mr. Leonard Boyne, somewhat weighty as a comedian, but a magnetic player and the finest stage lover of the younger generation; by Miss Ellis Jeffreys, always elegant, always refined, even when she has to impersonate such a hazardous character as that of the hysterical South American; by Mr. Lloyd Lowndes and Miss Elsie Chester, both characteristic in the miniature parts of valet and *femme de chambre*.

But, after all, Miss Marie Tempest is the play, and her acting is the one subject that occupies our thoughts after the curtain's fall. For we have here the manifestation of something novel: an English actress exhibiting all the most salient qualities of a Parisian *comédienne*. Whether by intuition or by study, Miss Tempest has learned to understand the intrinsic meaning of the French saying, *Glissez, n'appuyez pas*—insinuate, don't insist; and thus without apparent effort, without boisterousness or emphasis, she keeps her audience in a state of fascination and gentle glee. It is an art of wonderful subtlety and refinement. It is, in fact, the art of comedy, which so many of our actors confound with the mere craft of farce.

ST. JAMES'S THEATRE: "IF I WERE KING"

SEPTEMBER 6, 1902

"Look what he makes of history!" grumbled one of Mr. McCarthy's critics. "Too noisy!" quoth another. "And how silly to introduce that stupid ballet, it positively ruins the act," proclaimed yet a third; and as I listened my sympathy went out to the author, castigated for other people's peccadilloes.

For let me tell you that whatever may discount your pleasure during the performance of *If I were King* should not be charged to the author's debit. He did not profess to write a historical play—he could not have done it, as half the life of François Villon is a myth. He did not engineer nor ordain the vociferations of untrained crowds of supers. And if he desired a dance, I feel sure that he, who is an expert in matters choregraphic, could not approve of the meaningless saltation to inappropriate tunes, which was a blot on the splendid production of his play at the St. James's Theatre.

It is well that these matters should be brought forward, for the setting of a play is often as important as the text. Rough writing—common melodrama—may require noise and bustle and sledge-hammer delivery, but delicate writing, such as is to be found in *If I were King*, should be vitalised by trained voices, by carefully-drilled crowds, by a harmony of atmosphere in which the spoken word should never be overwhelmed

by clamour and clank of armour. All this was fully understood in New York, where I saw the play a year ago, and came away enchanted. For the spirit had stirred my blood, and the language—terse, picturesque, poetic, with a pretty lining of humour—had kindled my imagination. Here was a romantic play of an English woof that could hold its own with the best of the Dumas school; here was the blow of the north-west wind that sets faces aglow and wafts healthy feelings across the borders of stage-land.

In London, spirited as the performance was, some of that enchantment seemed to fade. It was too loud, it was too slow of pace, it had not the grip which is essential in plays of romantic heroism. For all that, the audience took the keenest interest in the amours and the singular metamorphosis of Villon the Hooligan and poet, into Villon, Grand Constable of France, saviour of his country, critic, yet protector, of its King. Particularly the rugged love-scenes between François and his tavern sweetheart, Huguette, seemed to fascinate the audience. The girl was played—in boy's clothes—by Miss Suzanne Sheldon with such heart and soul that she fairly conquered the honours of the evening. And the *Quartier Latin* spirit that floated around the poet and the King was as forcible a picture of the period as could well be conceived in a drama with no pretence to realism. But in every act there was a situation, a scene, an emotional thrill which intensified the interest of the story; and if only the actors had scented the humour that lurked beneath it all, there would have been something more than a great success—there would have been a triumph. To a certain extent the difference is due to Mr. George Alexander, who was breezy, vigorous, and manly as Villon, but who spent his force in nervous emphasis, instead of husbanding it for the airy *esprit* that is inseparable from the character of François the lampoonist. Romantic Mr. George Alexander's

impersonation undoubtedly was, but he forgot to be humorous, to be joyful, and to be satirical. Thus he entirely misconceived the ballad "If François Villon were King of France," which he rendered with pathos, when delicate sarcasm was the keynote. The Katherine—François' haughty lady-love—fared well in the hands of Miss Julie Opp. She was beautiful to behold, and when she gave free rein to her emotions there were tears in her voice. Her performance was slightly uneven, but pointed to improvement after the first night, and at any rate revealed quiet promise. As for the Louis XI. of Mr. Charles Fulton, that was a revelation. At first the influence of Irving seemed to hover over the artist, but when he had banished his famous model, he drew a new and quite original portrait of the notorious king. He toned down the innate cruelty of the character, accentuated its sarcastic humour, and infused enough human feeling into the conception to relieve it of its grimness.

The production of *If I were King*, much scope as it gives to criticism and differences of opinion, is memorable in more respects than one. It proves that we have an author who can write romantic plays undefiled by the vulgarity of melodrama, and that all sorts and conditions of men are willing to worship at the shrine of the fantastic, if words and pictures alike captivate their imagination.

HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE : "THE ETERNAL CITY"

OCTOBER 5, 1902

I

ACCORDING to publishers' statistics, most people must have read the novel. I have not. Thus when I entered the theatre, my mind was virgin soil. It is a virgin forest now, and deep within it smoulders indignation. I scarce know how to cut a critical path through the farrago of absurdity and bathos. It costs me infinite pains to calm the feelings aroused by the desecration of the head of Catholic Christendom. I confess that had I not been convened to the theatre in an official capacity, I should have given free rein to my emotions, and have cried "Shame!" on the author, "Shame!" on the Licensor who allows wanton laceration of the tenderest feelings of millions of fellow citizens. This is no laughing matter. When in *A Gaiety Girl* or some such sort of play, a clergyman of our own Church is held up to ridicule, the Censor rightly interferes, and demands alteration of the character. But when in a common melodrama like this, at a playhouse newly rechristened in the name of the Ruler over many Catholics, the Pope—Pio X., with the unmistakable traits of Pio IX. (born, Mastai Ferretti)—is presented as a party to negotiations which

tend to make him an accessory to crime ; as making common cause with his enemy of the Quirinal ; is convicted of unchastity in bygone days and illegitimate paternity ; then the Lord Chamberlain calmly grants his licence, forgetful of decorum and of the reverence due to the creeds of all men.

Still, the author is the main sinner. He may well tell us "that the action of the drama is cast into the future to show that no personal reference is intended." But can he deny that in the forging of his plot he exaggerated the antecedents of Mastai Ferretti ? Can he deny that Baron Bonelli is moulded after the model of an Italian Prime Minister of recent date ? Can he deny that if all his nonsense of the intercourse between Quirinal and Vatican, of summary trials by court-martial, of corruption and intrigue, is mere caricature, it is not founded on actuality such as he saw and ill digested in Italy of to-day ? Can he deny the reports that he sought and was refused an audience of the Pope, whose See he sullied for the sake of the book market and commercial drama ? If so, let it be swiftly done.

II

I reiterate my inability to mete out analytical criticism to this gigantic compilation of histrionic olla-podrida. From first to last every act complicates and never elucidates, the plot. In every scene the long arm of coincidence and cunning drags in new sensations by the hair. In the first act it is the theme of *Souvent femme varie*. "Give Rossi to me," says Roma to the Prime Minister, "and I will fell him for having insulted me." She goes and falls promptly in love with him—and therefore ends a play and a conflict. Having done in one act what experienced craftsmen do in three, Mr. Caine, in order to prolong the agony, goes to Sardou and borrows from *Tosca* and *Fédora*,

goes to the Petticoat-lane of melodrama and lays hands on what second-hand rubbish he can get—forgeries, perjury, sedition, riot and battery, telephones of grotesque and unique operation, mock-trials, pageantry, hide-and-seek play behind doors, ecclesiastic paraphernalia, pistols—in brief, all that has been well worn, refurbished to nausea, since Father Dennerly and his tribe began to torture humanity on the Procrustes bed for the purpose of melodrama. Yet, with all this expenditure of sensations, to say nothing of scenic luxury and magnificence of costume, the true note of drama is never struck. The plot is inexplicable. The characters are talking automata, vivid, but not vital. The language, the terrible language, swollen like rain-fed waterfalls, yet devoid of all grace and sincerity, overawes in its profusion, but it never grips. It is all grandiloquence, with nothing behind it. I seek in vain for cause to praise. I seek in vain for the recollection of one thrill, one throb, one appeal to my emotions and my intellect. I seek in vain for a line of literature, for one solitary thought that is worth remembering. On the other hand, how much there is to carp at, from inaccurate observation of men and manners to colloquial monstrosities, as, for instance, when the Prime Minister of the Quirinal tells the Holy Father in (N.B., "IN") the Vatican that he has come to discuss politics, not ethics. Truly it is a sorry affair, which on the Surrey side would call forth banter; but here, in the now foremost playhouse of London, only a sigh of despair.

III

"Don't shoot the pianist—he is doing his best!" The quotation from the Texas tavern is irresistible, for we must not visit the sins of the author on the pall-bearers of his work. That the performance, on the whole, was but mediocre, cannot be gainsaid; particu-

larly, the scenes of crowds and bustle were ill-regulated and mechanical. An air of cheap splendour overhung it all. The master-touch of stage management, which we are wont to admire in Mr. Tree's grand manœuvres, was wanting. And, to a certain extent, this helter-skelter all along the line affected the players. But apart from that, what can one expect actors to do with material so copious, yet so poor? Is it a wonder that Mr. Tree, one of the most trenchant conversationalists on the English stage, only carries partial conviction, when, as a caricature of a statesman, he has to unburthen himself of yards of platitudes? Is it a wonder that Mr. Robert Taber, at times a fine actor with distinct leanings towards impressionism, gets but poor reward for his efforts to be natural and sincere? Lastly, is it not a miracle that Mr. Brandon Thomas, burdened with a Pope fallible in every respect, and therefore unimpressive from the outset, knows how to preserve the dignity of the *Stola* and to command respect in the audience? All told, there were but three tolerable parts in the cast of two score and ten, and these were filled by Miss Constance Collier, Mr. Lionel Brough, and Mr. William Devereux. And of that trio, Lionel Brough, grand old scion of yesterday's school, scored to the full in the one scene where a touch of human nature endeavoured to rend the web of artificiality. This man of the people *was* a man of the people. Beneath his belt there beat a heart. Mr. Devereux, too, deserves more than a passing compliment. His part was small, its nature heinous; it requires personality and power to conquer favour with chances so poor. Yet Mr. Devereux succeeded. The picture of the fallen man, dark of brow and dark of soul, lingers in our memory. This actor is "somebody"—he stands out from among the crowd. Miss Collier gave an estimable performance of Roma, but by no means one approaching greatness. She has plenty of force, both vocal and melodramatic; but her power

is limited. She may disturb, but she does not move us. She imposes, but she rarely impresses. Her gestures are sometimes majestic, as her attitudes are statuesque; but the everlasting clasping of hands and striking of hips, the oft-recurring profile attitude, are apt to become monotonous. They are of the stage stagey. In fine, Miss Collier is intense in what I would call the "offensive" of her art—scorn, hatred, opprobrium; but in the defensive—where the heart should be mightier than the mind—she is as yet still acting. The feelings may be in her, but she fails to rouse the sympathetic chord within us. And characters such as Roma in *The Eternal City* can only be wholly saved when the actress merges her craft in the emotions of the woman.

COMEDY THEATRE :
"THE WISDOM OF FOLLY"

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS, BY COSMO HAMILTON

"THE IRON DUKE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT, BY WALTER FRITH

OCTOBER 12, 1902

I

IN dealing with the work of an author who is not a mere journeyman playwright but a man of letters and *esprit*, a good deal of credit should be given for good intentions. After all, in this country the divorce between literature and the drama is so very nearly absolute that every effort to cultivate style calls for encouragement. If in Mr. Hamilton's case both the public and the critics are inclined to be harsh, the fault is all his own. There is such a thing as nausea caused by cleverness. We have all suffered from it in society. Even the dullard is preferable to the man who wants to be funny at all costs. And this surfeit of forced wit is the prime fault of Mr. Hamilton's play. Ah! if he had a story to tell or characters to unfold, if there were fuel beneath the spluttering flames, the thing would be quite different. Oscar Wilde knew how to manage it in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. But he

was a dramatist born; his jests were charged with inner meaning. Moreover, Oscar Wilde was, in a sense, the creator of a movement. Time and Society were ripe for epigrams, and epigrams he made the fashion. Since then it has outlived its first freshness, and it is Mr. Hamilton's misfortune that he has tried to take time by the coat-tails instead of taking it by the forelock. A little playing on words is still an agreeable condiment for an evening's fare; but when there is all word-play and no drama the game becomes tiresome.

Or do you call such facile matter as this funny?

"Do be careful, appendicitis is in the air."

"Law, like burglary, has its fascination."

"A civil servant, who forgot somehow that he was civil."

"So-and-So, C.B.—so cool in the summer."

"My dear Arthur, I never forget anything I remember."

And thus it goes on in torrential endlessness for three acts. Why! it is a mere trick. Of course, in juxtaposition to such feebleness there is a good deal that is clever, much that reveals a graceful pen, but it soon fleets out of sight because the too much is the enemy of the enough, and there is no background. Mr. Hamilton had no plot. His three old soldiers and lawyers fooling around a feather-brained woman who promises her hand to each, although she is not yet widowed, are not (although, of course, they might be) wildly amusing. And less so when every quip and every situation and every form of speech are repeated thrice and four times over. Comedy cannot live on mere artificial comicality; it requires a substantial groundwork of sustained interest, and, above all, firm characterisation. All this is wanting in *The Wisdom of Folly*. It will read well, without a doubt, but it does not act. The *technique* of the stage and of the newspaper skit do not fraternise. The

former exacts vitality, the latter can exist on mere vividness.

II

The match between actors and play was also not happy. The fragility of the structure rendered the players vacillating. There was humming and hawing; there was halting and suspense. Nor was Miss Kingston quite equal to the task of carrying the heavy burden of the omnipresent heroine. She worked with an ardour worthy of a better cause; moments and fragments of diction were excellent. But Miss Kingston, one of our most intelligent actresses, is not convincing, not forcible enough to be "the play," although she is always remarkable *in* a play. Her voice is inclined to give way, and as her speech adopts intonations which are tersely described as "uppa suckle" elocution, she somehow does not hit us in the right place. We admire often, but we are not carried away. Among the other members of the cast, Miss Lily Grundy made an agreeable impression by her freshness and naturalness of manner, and Mr. Holman Clark as a pedantic, loquacious old lawyer once more revealed his gifts as a remarkable character-actor. More cannot be said about the performance, for some of the players did not know their parts, and other clever people had none to know.

III

There was a little ray of sunshine in the cloudy atmosphere. This was right at the beginning of the evening, when Mr. Walter Frith's new one-act play, *The Iron Duke*, saw the light. Rarely have twenty minutes been turned to better account. The subject was dangerous. The sublimity of greatness is apt to

become ridiculous in the process of dramatic adaptation. But Mr. Frith has done the daring deed successfully. He has drawn for us a thumbnail of Wellington that pairs well with tradition and our imagination. We saw the Duke in all his bluntness and severity, and we also had a peep into the inner man—the man who once loved a woman, and in after years feels that love rekindled when he meets her offspring. It was charming and pathetic—one act worth many others, and it was finely acted by Master Sidney Carlyle, a little miracle of histrionic instinct and attractive precociousness, and by Mr. Charles Cartwright as the Duke. Truly actor and author have every reason to shake hands in congratulation. If the one created the soul, the other achieved the materialisation. Mr. Cartwright has never done anything so finely balanced, so powerful, yet so artistically restrained.

AVENUE THEATRE:
"MRS. WILLOUGHBY'S KISS"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY FRANK STAYTON

OCTOBER 19, 1902

"HEAR, hear!" said I mentally when Mr. Frank Curzon, addressing an unjust and turbulent fraction of the gallery, announced that the play of the evening was the work of a young author of twenty-four, and that he (the speaker) was satisfied with the result. He had ample reasons to be, for even an older dramatist would have no need to feel ashamed of this uneven but intellectual production.

Mr. Frank Stayton is, at any rate, a man of ideas; he endeavours to break away from the commonplace; and if, as yet, his hand is not quite steady, his freedom not absolute, he needs but perseverance to cure the shortcomings of his nonage.

The basis of his story is both peculiar and dramatic. To a woman, I fancy, it would even seem tragic; but, being a mere man, I confess that it hurt me at times—hurt me by its clever touches of painful veracity.

This is the story. Two couples amicably separated by duty, the seas, and time. When the men went to India both women were comely, both men were fine specimens of their sex. Now, after years, they come back, and speculation is rife. Mrs. Willoughby is in the most adorable thirties, Mrs. Brandram is forty, of

rotund ripeness, and intellectually obese. And Mr. Willoughby, having lived in the wilds, a student of monkeys, has become somewhat simian; whereas Mr. Brandram is in the prime of his manhood. Somehow—and you must take that for granted—the span of time has dulled their memories: the splendid man sees the splendid woman, and before they pause to inquire, lips meet lips and the mischief is done.

Some people will sneer at this forgetfulness and the fatality of Mrs. Willoughby's kiss. I disagree with them. For there is not only the kiss, there is the conflict of characters. Mrs. Willoughby is in every respect Brandram's mate, but Mrs. Brandram, fussy, *bourgeoise*, busy-bodying with area talk, lower middle-class adoration of "carriage-people," and other similar snobbism, is his veriest antithesis. Is it astonishing that, as the two couples live in the same block of flats, affinity should assert itself, and bring matters to a catastrophe, only just (and Britannically) averted by maternal instinct and an energetic daughter?

In this question lies the interest of the play and its weakness. A great dramatist, say a Pinero or Dumas *fil*s, would have given the one possible answer. He would have sacrificed home and hearth to the flame of passion. But a talented beginner dares not be hardy to the end. He yields on the crucial point, prevents the flight of the lovers, shirks the cut—the *coup de canif*—and the marriage certificate. Hence there is concession and conciliation all round, and the result, as far as the spectator is concerned, is a play well written, bright with humour, bold from the start, but not to the finish. A play to be seen, to be discussed, and—to arouse future expectations.

I would fain call *Mrs. Willoughby's Kiss* a play written by a man for women in general and actresses in particular. The chances which Mr. Stayton offered to Miss Ellis Jeffreys, Miss Florence St. John, and Miss Annie Hughes, were immense, and, without

exaggeration, they succeeded immensely. That trio was the joy of the evening. Fancy three accomplished *comédiennes* united on one London stage! The thing is almost beyond belief. And it is difficult to differentiate. Miss Jeffreys, who rises at every step, held us by her exquisite manners, her pure, distinct, thoughtful diction, her pathos, which never struck a note too emphatic. Miss Hughes, who is apt to force the intensity of her luxurious voice, and thereby to fringe upon insincerity, held us fast by her youthful charm and her true power in the scene wherein she converts her father to endurance. Miss St. John, whose career as a *comédienne* was forecast when she shone in comic opera, belied none of our hopes. She may yet cling to some mannerisms of her former school, but she, like Miss Tempest, is a *comédienne* born. She submitted gracefully to the middle-aged demands of Mrs. Brandram, and in doing so she exhibited all the petulance, all the gay naturalness of a youthful nature. She promises to become the Jeanne Granier of our stage.

If in this women's play the men were less happily placed than their partners, there is no reason to find much fault. Mr. Frank Mills was in splendid manly form as Brandram; Mr. Sam Sothern was arduous enough to convey "twenty-three and a ready plunge into matrimony"; Mr. Bernage did not unduly emphasise the peculiarities of ape-loving Mr. Willoughby; and Mr. Scott-Buist will be quite acceptable as a Dumas *fil*s kind of *raisonneur* when he recognises the fact that in high-class comedy the speed of the Flying Scotchman is preferable to that of the suburban South-Eastern service.

ADELPHI THEATRE: "CAPTAIN KETTLE"

DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS, BY MALCOLM WATSON AND
MURRAY CARSON

OCTOBER 26, 1902

I

IT is painful to find Mr. Malcolm Watson, a well-known critic of a large paper, collaborating with Mr. Murray Carson in such a sorry production as *Captain Kettle*. One cannot withhold the question, What will the world, what will the authors, the managers, and the actors say, when the judges lend their hands to the manufacture of garish wares of the penny plain, twopence coloured order? Surely, however great the temptation may be to write down to the crowd, the critics should remain leaders, and not join forces with commercial managers who are slowly but surely forcing our drama down to the lowest level. Mr. Watson can do excellent work, as was shown in *The Pharisee*; why must he now wrong his own aspirations by turning sensational magazine matter into unexciting, puerile melodrama? For to call this play a "drama," as the adapters do, is sheer audacity. It is not even melodrama, for it lacks coherence and clearness. A few pictures are lifted from the book and flung pell-mell upon the stage without a solid frame to hold them together. Evidently it was surmised that everybody had read the magazine or the

book which contained Kettle's exploits. But such a supposition is erroneous and indefensible. I, playgoer, cannot be called upon to come to the theatre prepared like a schoolboy. I have a right to expect a story properly worked out and defined in a given number of chapters. If I do not get what I have bargained for, I am dissatisfied, and rightly so. The drama is the art of preparation on the playwright's part. The spectator expects something else—he wants initiation.

Now, if one of my young friends had not happened to tell me about the fearful and wonderful adventures of the puny Captain, who carried the courage of a giant in the frame of a pigmy, the play would not have given me a chance to make head or tail of the story. The play adduces no just cause for the Captain's expedition to South America in order to save some lady's brother, nor any impediment to his staying at home with his wife and children in Sunderland. For there is no direct motive—neither love nor passion—nor yet filthy lucre, as far as I can remember; thus merely foolhardiness. And that latter motive may be a good basis for a rattling tale of sensation, but it is certainly a very uninteresting foundation for a drama. *Donnez de l'amour, toujours de l'amour*, said a great French writer. He was right. Mock heroines, unsubstantiated by the greatest motor of the universe—love—may grip, but they do not hold. Revolvers, mutiny, and all kinds of grandiose deeds contrary to rhyme, reason, and common sense, may appeal to the juveniles who revel in boys' stories, but the thinking multitude soon wearies of them. It does not impress them any more than the Governor's hat did William Tell.

II

But apart from its foundation and framework, *Captain Kettle* is a poor play, because it is dull, in spite of the

bustle ; because it is impossible instead of being fanciful. Take the scene which represents the prison of St. Lazare at Cayenne. Here is an attempt to give us an idea of a French penal settlement, the very name of which makes us shudder, for the atmosphere is pregnant with the miseries of Dreyfus on the Isle du Diable. And what do the adapters make of it ? A castle in gorgeous antique style, peopled with convicts who are flogged—in ludicrous contradiction to French law, or do entirely what they like—and with soldiers of the lowest low-comedy. Some of these soldiers are foreigners ; one of them is a comic Irishman who involuntarily assists the flight of Kettle in a picnic basket (shades of Falstaff!) by allowing himself to be spirited away in his sentry-box, as if Mr. Maskelyne himself were at work with his tricks and cupboards. Truly it is too silly for words, and it is galling to find the awe-inspiring hell of Cayenne thus ridiculed with mere sleight-of-hand tricks. Such sloughs of human despond should not be trifled with. Or have the adapters never read “Criminopolis,” by Paul Mimande, or Dreyfus’s “Five Years of My Life” ? If not, let them make amends and blush. Cayenne made comic for the purpose of melodrama ! In the name of taste, is it permissible ?

Withal, the play bristles with incongruities ; Captain Kettle, an Englishman, speaks with an American accent and imitates American manners—as they are seen in the comic papers ; French and Spanish fragments of speech are introduced to lay on local colour ; on the other hand, Kettle, in the South American country of Anchuria, addresses the crowd in English, and is acclaimed for his pains. It all sounds funny, but it is not.

For the play, then, I find no apology. It is not thrilling. It is not well built. It is neither logical nor imaginative. At best it is bad melodrama with one difference ; I refer to the dialogue. Apart from some

questionable jokes which needlessly drag in the German Emperor and Nelson's famous sixpence, the dialogue is sometimes above the Adelphi standard. There is less redundancy and clap-trap; it is written with a pen instead of with a clod. But was it worth writing at all? That is the question. As a colleague of Mr. Watson, I say emphatically, No.

III

In the paragraphic and interviewing profusion heralding the advent of a mountain, which turned out after all but a sorry little mouse, we read a great deal of the impossibility of finding the right man for the right place. Finally, Mr. Murray Carson found him in—Mr. Murray Carson. This self-sacrifice is almost as heroic as Kettle's; and since Mr. Carson in a Sunday interview declared that he was quite satisfied with the cast save one, his modesty is even greater than his heroism. But I agree with Mr. Carson. I am not wholly satisfied either. In the first place, Mr. Carson is not a "tom-tit" of a man, but a well-built specimen of our sex; in the second he has not sufficient magnetism for a part which requires "leadership." In default of this, he substitutes all manners of acrobatics and devices—genuflections, ceaseless contortions, hard work with limb and head and vocal chords. But with all that he does not realise the character. The wig is excellent, the ruddy beard sublime; the perpetual cigar excites our admiration (and our fear of nicotine poisoning); we appreciate the ardour, the multiplicity, the continuity of his labour, but it remains a *salto mortale*, not a powerful characterisation. The other characters do not call for much comment. Mr. W. L. Abingdon, the grand young villain of our stage, looked the picture of a mulatto and displayed as much intensity as the part would allow; Mr. C. Aubrey Smith, always conscientious and manly,

made much of an uninteresting *jeune premier*; Mr. Mark Kinghorne carried the house in a scene of struggle between duty and drink; Mr. Leslie Faber gained sympathy for an unsympathetic half-hero, a character certainly not worth a South American expedition; and Miss Esmé Beringer, statuesque, majestic in gesture, dignified in speech, infused some of her own passion into the South American pretender, whom the authors had but poorly supplied with warm blood. There were many good actors in the cast, but most of them were wasted. They all laboured like Trojans in a mine that was "salted."

COMEDY THEATRE

"MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE

A ROMANTIC COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS, BY BOOTH
TARKINGTON AND E. G. SUTHERLAND

OCTOBER 26, 1902

I

SOME plays are like champagne, and a pint of *carte d'or* at the right time is an excellent pick-me-up. Even the jaded Duchess of Strood believed in its infallibility. But champagne, along with many other good things of this world, has little secrets of its own besides its aftermath. You must not scrutinise the brand too closely nor think too deeply of the morrow lest much of the pleasure be spoilt. And that is precisely the case with *Monsieur Beaucaire*, which popped off like a triumphant cork at the Comedy. I warn you, if your mind, in *blasé* goutiness, is beyond the champagne romance and stirring adventure, beyond the rose that falls from a woman's hand, beyond the youthful ideal of conquering a heart, then pray leave the play alone, for it is not perfect, not real—it is merely champagne on the surface, and perhaps Saumur or even "Mother Gooseberry" *au fond*. But if, on the other hand, you like the airship of fancy that lifts you for a while beyond the dreams of toil and avarice, then I can recommend *Monsieur Beaucaire*.

After all, it is pleasant to come across a play which

has all the stirring qualities of time-honoured melodrama and none of its vulgarity. Costumes and eighteenth-century courtliness go for little in themselves, but when they are fitted into a pretty story, in which the central figure is a Duc d'Orleans, ready to suffer disgrace, duels, and all manner of detraction for the sake of a pretty English maiden, not of the blood-royal, the whole atmosphere of the conceit becomes picturesque, provided that there is no flagging in action and acting. In *Monsieur Beaucaire* there is hardly a moment of languor, and so dexterously have the authors studied the gentlemen of France who were past masters of romantic drama—I refer to Dumas *père* and his followers—that when now and again there is too much breathing-time, one doubts whether the play or the players are to blame. At any rate, so long as M. Beaucaire, scorned in the incognito of a barber, accepted as a Duke of Chateaurien, revered as His Royal Highness of Orleans, yet always loved by the same English lady—holds the stage, we feel interested. There is not an ounce of human nature in the whole clever game of the chess-board, but there is plenty of movement, colour, vivacity—entertainment, in fact. Only once, towards the close, we are dis—well, let me say disappointed with the Royal Duke. That is when he publicly denounces his enemy and rival for cheating at cards. Then he is neither of regal dignity nor of gracious dignity. But one overlooks that; the breeze of champagne spreads exhilaration; ungracious reflections are deferred till to-morrow.

II

I would not be understood to over-rate the merits of this pictorial, lively, unpretentious play. It is but skin deep, and if it occupies our mind at all, it is in the spirit of pure amusement. The characters are shrewd

marionettes ; the situations are clever fretwork after well-worn patterns ; the dialogue, as far as I remember it, flows well through the channels of the stage. All I can say is that boredom never crept upon me, that I enjoyed now and again a good laugh, and that I admired Mr. Lewis Waller's acting intensely. For characters such as Beaucaire, the barber, *alias* Duc de Chateaurien, *alias* Duc d'Orleans, an actor is wanted who, as it were, reconstructs a period. He must be a courtier, a gentleman, a swashbuckler, an orator, a picture to behold, a picturesque impersonator. Mr. Lewis Waller is all that ; and, in spite of a French accent, he carried the play and everything before him. It was a creation in which the grand old art of yesterday grafted itself upon the methods of to-day. After Beaucaire, his English enchantress claimed the best part of our attention, and in Miss Grace Lane it found an excellent exponent. To say that Miss Lane is always herself is to exaggerate. Miss Lane bears the impress of a training ; she is a faithful disciple of Mrs. Kendal, and when she waxes warm her diction is good—always good, but always awaking memories. It is Ken—dal ! Ken—dal ! Ken—dal ! all the time, but it is scholarly, it is impressive, and it certainly sounds far better than the nondescript elocution which so often makes us sigh for an academy—with all its faults.

GARRICK THEATRE: "MY LADY VIRTUE"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY H. V. ESMOND

NOVEMBER 2, 1902

I

IT is the privilege of the Judge on the Bench of the High Court to feign ignorance of the doings of the world at large. "Pray, who is Connie Gilchrist?" has become a motto and a sneer. But it behoves the critics of the drama to be generally well informed, lest ignorance might lead to injustice and detrimental misconstructions. Take this latest piece of Mr. H. V. Esmond. From the point of view of programme, public, and theatre, it is quite new, and therefore the obvious deduction is that it should be considered as a further development of the author's productiveness—as a factor in the evolution of his talent. But we happen to know, from communications to the Press, and latterly from criticisms in American papers, that *My Lady Virtue* is a comparatively early work of the young author, and that it is anterior to *Grierson's Way*, to *When we were Twenty-one*, and to *The Wilderness*. It is, I fancy, five years since we heard of it in connection with the repertoire of Mr. Tree. To know everything is to forgive—well, at any rate, a good deal. And that is fortunate for Mr. Esmond, for if it had been the latest manifestation of his gifts there could have been but one

verdict. *My Lady Virtue* would have distinctly marked retrogression. As it is, we can only regard it as a work of immaturity, with all the faults of the novitiate and some of its qualities.

But it is not for me to expatiate on the question as to whether it was wise to produce the play now, when the author has made visible progress. That rests with him and his manager. Personally, I regret that it has come at this moment, when a victory was needed to wipe out the memory of *The Sentimentalist*. And I fear that both criticism and the measure of public patronage will prove a disillusion to the parties interested. For *My Lady Virtue* is one of those works which can only live a little stage-life by great indulgence and patience on the part of the hearers. It teems with falsettos, starts from wrong premises, and compromises matters finally in a manner which is neither common sense nor good drama.

What was uppermost in Mr. Esmond's mind is clear enough. In the first place he wanted to write a good acting play with plenty of light and shade, with a series of appeals to our sentiment and our smiles. In the second, he busied himself with the problem. He endeavoured to demonstrate how fierce and fatal in this wicked world of ours is the battle against all that is untrue in the various meanings of that word, from the lie direct to diplomacy and tact. And to this end he drew *My Lady Virtue*, a lady thus nicknamed on the strength of the whiteness of her soul, the rigidity of her morals, her unfaltering allegiance to truth in all its branches. This young wife, married to a husband more successful in his Parliamentary career by good luck and circumstances than by the brilliancy of his brain, is suddenly confronted with a scandal. Her husband has, before his marriage, entertained doubtful relations with another man's wife; there is a compromising letter apparently sufficient to make him a co-respondent, and at the very moment when he is

being blackmailed, the incriminating document is surrendered to Lady Virtue by her pre-nuptial rival. Behold the situation in a nutshell. As Mr. Burville—that is the name of the other lady's husband—is cowing Sir Geoffrey Ernistone with threats of exposure, his wife enters with the compromising letter in her hand. She holds the key of the situation. If she delivers it to Sir Geoffrey the cloud is lifted, the conflict ended by removal of the cause. But she does not do that. Her love of candour, fortified by the knowledge that Mrs. Burville has abstracted the letter from Mr. Burville's possession, impels her to hand it to its rightful owner, and thereby to sacrifice her happiness, her peace, her home, and her husband. It is magnificent quixotism, but it is absurd. People don't do such things. This good woman, in her orthodox love of truth, violated the marriage vows. In his sorrow and the sickness of his soul she left her husband in the lurch, and her only apology was that she did not read the letter. Tell me, is there in the whole of these isles, to say nothing of the world in general, one loving woman—for she did love her husband—who could have acted so contrary to nature? If so, then let us cease to speak of love and its greatness. Our idol is shattered. Love is but an idle name.

II

There is no redress when, in a play which purports to depict men and manners of our time, the psychology of the central character is awry. It destroys our interest, and fills us with indifference. We then become even callous to all subsequent incongruities. Whether *My Lady Virtue* goes to Burville's house to recover the letter with bribery; whether the black-mailer becomes respectable for a while, and then adds insult to injury under the guise of gratitude by taking advantage of the defenceless woman, alone with him

in his room ; whether a gossip, turning up as by magic, sets the world a-talking about Lady Virtue's adventure ; whether in the end all the sinners repent, and virtue triumphs by the aid of artifice and outward circumstances—all this is of no avail. It is like saying, "I am sorry," when one has trodden on somebody's corns. It is accepted by the rules of courtesy, but it does not mend matters. Mr. Esmond had one situation on which the play hinged ; that situation failed by its inherent illogicalness. That implies failure of the play as a whole, and even the effort to strengthen it by a collateral plot, which is unfolded in the Burville family, rather accentuates than diminishes the fatal result.

Of course it is always easy to gloss over the narrative of a reverse by extolling incidental events. Thus, in the case of Mr. Esmond's play, one may point to some good colloquial scenes, to some traits of humour, to one character—of an indiscreet and comical duenna—excellently drawn, to a few touches of sentiment—Esmondisms I would fain call them, for they are peculiar to our author—which nicely touch a passing chord. But that is consolation, not satisfaction. Not the details, the broad outlines of the play are unsound, and where that is the case vitality is impaired beyond the hope of restoration.

III

Given the inconsistencies palpable in nearly every character of this singular work, I cannot imagine a better performance. Every single actor, except, perhaps, the admirable Mrs. Charles Calvert, truly immense as the garrulous duenna, and Miss Dolores Drummond, intensely vivacious, and a trifle too broad as a gossip society lady, had to struggle with contradictory parts. It must have been very difficult to build a uniform conception, most of all for Mr. Bouchier, who as Burville had to vacillate between blackguardism, amiability, and

sportive vulgarity. His performance was remarkable in every respect; it tried to strike a mean and to amalgamate these contrasts. His assurance, his control of character and stage, were all admirable. In Miss Violet Vanbrugh (Mrs. Burville) the effort to be consistent was more evidently laboured. She had moments of intense feeling; then again, as in the third act, in the long scene between Burville and his wife, she flagged. One felt her difficulty, for the author has drawn a curious mixture of goodness and badness, of frivolity and earnestness, in Mrs. Burville; to amalgamate these opposite elements is almost beyond human power. Miss Vanbrugh was almost in the same plight as Mr. Dawson Milward in this respect. Here the seesaw was between manliness and weakness. Both did all they could, and when the play has been lightened of superfluous dialogue they will do even better. But the best performance of all was Miss Eva Moore's as My Lady Virtue. The keynote of her talent is tenderness, the distinction of her method is expressiveness in silence. Her tenderness went far to diminish (if not to minimise) the insufferable phariseism of the character. Her wordless attitudes, while others were discussing Lady Virtue's fate around her, filled gaps in the drama. The distress and grief, unuttered yet expressed by the weeping little woman on the sofa, when her domestic hearth was in peril, and the world's tongues wagged scandal about her, were truly pathetic. In these touching moments the actress was the author's better half in more respects than one.

COURT THEATRE : "ELEANOR"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

NOVEMBER 2, 1902

I

THE higher drama is unspeakably dear to me. But I have no respect for would-be higher drama, which is merely drama on the hire system. And *Eleanor* belongs to the latter class. It is a desiccated novel. No doubt by mere coincidence there is bad Ibsen in it (the insane woman of "When we Awake from Death"), there is bad Camélias-Dumas (the death scene, carefully prepared for by "give me my wrap and my flowers"); and finally, an immensity of talk, such as was in one sense the fault and the virtue of the French drama of the eighties, and is latterly the unfathomable secret of Ibsen's fascination. But you have no idea of the pompous talk with which Mrs. Humphry Ward floods and soaks the stage. Six old gossipy learned German professors' wives invited to a "Kaffee-Klatsch" to settle "all the world and their fathers" could not create a greater upheaval of verbosity. In Mrs. Ward's play, when there is no more to be said, every character thrusts into a new narrative—an eternal lane with no visible turning. "Hear my story," says one—and off he goes. "Let me tell you something"—and whoop! more explanations. "I have a confession to make"—and one begins to sympathise with doctors and the interminable stories of woe poured out in their studies.

"Now listen to this little anecdote"—and then the late Chateaubriand is revived in a story which would be pointless but for the pointed fluency and Anglo-Italian charm of that accomplished *comédienne*, Miss Rosina Filippi. And so it goes on and on and on (as one hears people say when they relate adventures), and the result is a nutshell of a story, hopelessly adrift in an Atlantic of verbiage. For words alone will not rivet our interest to the tale of the elder woman sorrowfully ousted from a man's affections by the budding charm of a young girl. The subject (the *donnée*), though of ancient lineage, is evergreen in its interest, when it is vitalised by characters of some individuality, and not merely in a form which suggests leaves torn from a book and strung together somehow for the purpose of a drama.

But the admirers of Mrs. Ward will say, "granted that the characters are bookworms, that the construction of the play betrays unfamiliarity with the stage, can you deny the beauty, richness, style of the language? Is this not the literature on the stage for which you are constantly clamouring?" And my reply will be, "No, this is not the literature we want at all." This is ponderous profusion of sentences that rebel against the human jaw. The actors cannot speak it, or when they succeed in squeezing it beyond their lips it falls like froth upon the cold ground. To tell the whole truth, the uncomfortable truth, this play should not have been produced, would not have been produced if it had been signed by a name unknown. But such lion hunters have we become that fame in one direction is considered proof of ability in another. Would any manager have touched *The Christian*, *The Eternal City*, or *Eleanor*, if it had been written by Smith the obscure, or Brown, of Mean Street? Verily commerce and clique choose strange bedfellows, and I very much question whether Mrs. Humphry Ward has reason to jubilate at her being proclaimed "dramatist."

II

It comes to this. If Mrs. Humphry Ward had brought her play to any judge—actor, manager, or critic—who would have given his opinion, fearless of her celebrity, unblinded by her halo of fame as a novelist, he could have convinced her in a few words of the impracticability of her work. He would have told her that mere dialogue makes no play, so that, to begin with, two-thirds of the talk should go by the board. He would have explained to her that what may seem reflective and philosophical in a book, is apt to sound ponderous and pretentious on the stage. He would have pointed out that clearness of conception, of conduct, and of issue, is the alphabet of craftsmanship, and that the playgoer cannot be expected to read a novel before going to the play, nor to bring it with him as a sort of “Baedeker” to the drama. Lastly, he would have deprecated the introduction of the mad woman (a mere collateral character in the book) and the long death-scene as unoriginal both, and the latter worn to tatters. Summing up, he would have advised her to consign the play to the oblivion of the desk, for all these restrictions cut the ground from under its feet. All this is not pleasant reading to the authoress, nor is it pleasant writing to the critic. But *noblesse oblige*! A little beginner, timidly craving a hearing after Heaven knows how much time spent in anxious waiting and on door-mats, may be dismissed in sympathising clemency or benevolent silence, but an authoress of established fame can only be treated with severe justice. Had there been traces of dramatic instinct, scenes that appeal to the heart or even merely to the mind, I should have been the first to burn incense. But there was languor from beginning to end, and even an audience literally mute with preconceived admiration and friendship awoke with difficulty to somnolent attention and unconvincing applause.

III

In one respect the afternoon was not quite a blank. We saw some beautiful acting and we discovered some possibilities in players of the younger generation. Miss Rosina Filippi has already been mentioned, and words can but faintly pay a sufficient tribute to Miss Marion Terry, that personification of all that is sweet in womanhood, whose gigantic struggle with a part as long as Hamlet twice told, moved every hearer. She threw herself with all her soul and winsomeness into the maelstrom, and if even she did not quicken our pulse, the fault was not hers. Another excellent performance of a difficult and ungrateful part was Miss Braithwaite's. The personality of Eleanor's rival is wholly passive. She has to play in a minor key; she is but a mass of conventions. Miss Braithwaite understood it all, and did her best to fan life into the nonentity; it was thankless, uphill work, but the effect was praiseworthy. Miss Robins, most weirdly attired in a gown best described as the gala costume of a lady undertaker—if there are such—brought all her Ibsen experience to bear on the figure of the mad woman. Miss Robins composed the incidental character of fragments from *The Master Builder*, from Asta in *Little Eyolf*, and from *When we Awake from Death*. The *ensemble* was extraordinary, but it served. The character made us uncomfortable if it did not inspire awe, and that probably was the intention of the authoress. The men had meagre parts, but at least one of them made his mark. Mr. Leslie Faber, only latterly remarked as a promising newcomer, developed unmistakable gifts as a *jeune premier*. He is manly, he speaks well, he impresses without digressing into ranting. If he continues in this way, the thin ranks of our sincere actors will be the richer by one. Mr. Charles Quartermaine, too, made a good impression as Manisty, the

none too sympathetic idol of Eleanor. Such vacillating parts lay a heavy burden on the actors' shoulders, particularly when there is evidence of little experience. But Mr. Quartermaine, still somewhat *gauche* and stiff, commands a fair diction, and that is no mean advantage in these days of mumbling and invertebrate delivery. So to the actors our thanks are due for their valiant defence of a forlorn hope. But, oh! how sorry we were for them that they had to stock their memories with so many yards of yarn, which failed to produce an inch of cloth.

ROYALTY THEATRE: "LYRE AND LANCET"

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS, BY F. ANSTEY AND
F. KINSEY PEILE

NOVEMBER 9, 1902

I

Not precisely a play, but a very good joke, with an amusing start, an excellent middle, and, unluckily, a long dash instead of a "pat" point at the finish. If the authors and managers had only remembered that good old French adage that "better is the enemy of good," there would have been no dissentient voice in the house. For a hearty British peal of laughter, which is the next best thing to the more exquisite "*franc rire gaulois*," overlooks a multitude of peccadilloes. And we did laugh at times with all the zest of a "Punch" reader who looks upon Anstey as a panacea against all manner of moral ills. Only in the midst of our joy we were too often checked by interruptions—things like footling conversations, and dances, beside the mark. Oh! these dances! Last-century managers in doubt used to play *East Lynne*, and authors in a "fix" strummed up for a hop or a minuet. Both tricks have become obsolete, and now that the people have found out the trick, a little too much dancing has become a dangerous thing. We tolerated it once with composure in this comic story of

Messrs. Anstey and Kinsey Peile, for, after all, it is amusing to behold a ball in the servants' hall, when for once the employers, without malice or mockery (as in *The Admirable Crichton*), make merry with servants. But when, for want of a better climax, a dance replaces the *scène à faire* then—well, then the fun fizzles out amid the rustle of mantles, the click of opera-glass cases, and the clack of the opera-hat. It was like the stale fruit—so common in our smaller restaurants—after a dainty dinner.

II

There was good fun. Again and again we were reminded of *The Man from Blankley's*. And although the imbroglio of the "vet." who was mistaken for a poet, and the poet who had to submit to the scant courtesy accorded to a canine "vet," merely repeated the old story differently, and not so funnily nor so well, that did not spoil matters. Mr. Anstey is always fond of sending his comic heroes to the "wrong shop," and on the road he lets fall many a salient remark and clever observation. In its original form the theme of this play was an excellent skit on our young Pegasus hack riders, who aspire to be worshipped as the poets laureate of Piccadilly Circus, and other neighbourhoods in this world, where, apparently, the sordid inspires the doubtful. Yet in the dramatic form the satire has been watered down. Too much talk has been added which could be spared, and the apparatus does not work so satisfactorily as might be expected. We feel some antagonism between the originator (Mr. Anstey) and the co-adapter (Mr. Peile). The one desires free rein for his humour; the other aims at confining that humour in the corsets of dramatic exigencies. Result: the figure, viewed from all sides, is not quite fascinating. Now it charms, now it irritates, on account of imperfect fit. It is a picnic sort of play; there is a lot

of good stuff in the hamper, and there is some bad. It depends on your digestion and your mood how it will make for your well-being.

III

If I may speak for myself, I own to having enjoyed a pleasant evening, in spite of minor disappointments. And holding the scales I credit just half of my pleasure to the authors, and the other to the actors—to one actor in particular. I refer to Mr. Cosmo Stuart. His performance of the poet was admirable; it was refined and full of subtle humour. It was a generous mixture of the Latin Quarter and the various queer streets where London minor poetry flourishes. Mr. Stuart vitalised Mr. Anstey's satire. There was swing in his diction, there was fancy in his impersonation of the *précieux ridicule*. He was the Yellow Book redivivus—the lyric lancet of the evening.

Excellent, too, was Mr. George Giddens as the "Vet." worshipped as a poet. Mr. Giddens, in his evergreen juvenility, is the very man to hold a straggling play together. He is the kind of actor to whom the Scottish greeting applies: "I like your face—give me your hand." The cast in general was a long lane, and—forgive my rudeness!—I prefer to salute the men and to turn away from most of the ladies. Among the latter the amateur was far too much in evidence, and this even enhanced the meritorious achievements of Miss Kate Talbot, always a splendid dowager; of Miss Fairfax, attractive, but just a "cut" above the ladies' maid; of Miss Katherine Stewart, full of humorous dignity as a *beau idéal* of a house-keeper, with snow-white hair and youthful features; of Miss Mayne Young, a new *comédienne* whose mobility of speech and countenance reveals some promise.

But the men were nearly all remarkable in their "thumbnails" of characters. To name Mr. Wyes, butler; Mr. Littledale Power, groom; Mr. Forbes Dawson, soldier-servant; Mr. Gerald Gurney, gentleman; Mr. Bromley-Davenport, a somnolent lord; Mr. Ernest Lawford, a wag and a "thinker," is to testify how many clever artists contributed to the success of the play. Let us hope that it will not be love's labour lost. The play is merely an elaborate joke, but it is welcome in these days when good fun without vulgarity is at a premium.

DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE: "THE ADMIRABLE CRICHTON"

FANTASY IN FOUR ACTS, BY J. M. BARRIE

NOVEMBER 9, 1902

THERE are two points of view. Either you accept the description of *The Admirable Crichton* as a fantasy in the spirit of the author, which tends to disarm criticism, and to make prefatory apologies for all manner of impossibilities, or you argue: Fantasy or no fantasy, it is my business to look upon it as a play, and to test its ethics, its form, and its *raison d'être*. In order to be fair to the author, let us look at both sides of the question, and begin with

POINT OF VIEW NUMBER ONE

I speak for the average playgoer, who since *The Little Minister* considers Mr. Barrie and all his works as a sort of national institution, and worships on the principle, "the King can do no wrong."

"Ah! It recalls the heyday of Gilbertian humour. Here is delightful topsy-turveydom grafted on a verisimilar story of modern life. Here is a new departure, a fantasy radiant with delightful, healthy humour. Once again Mr. Barrie has given proof of his inexhaustible versatility. Once more, yet in a new and surprising form, he has blended truth and fiction in a delicious fantasy, written in prose, yet conceived in poetry, and,

despite some exuberance of dialogue, he has kept his audience for well-nigh three hours in mirth and glee and joy. In the whole modern literature of our drama there is nothing so fresh, so youthful, so wholly fascinating. We thought of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, but we realised how much higher stands the Scot than the Dane. For if, on the surface of this exquisite play, all is rosewater and honeydew, there is infinitely more in it than meets the eye. There is, imperceptibly almost—for our Barrie is no preacher, his touch is much too light for that—a moral in the story and gentle philosophy in the dialogue. In his playful way Mr. Barrie demonstrates that if circumstances may alter cases—as for instance, when the masters and the *valetaille* are cast adrift on a desert island—in a normal world rank and servility cannot run in double harness. There is a place for the servant and a place for the master, and the laws of Society will no more allow the former to rise to the status of the latter than it will allow the master to stoop to the plane of his domestics.

“And how ingeniously Mr. Barrie has succeeded in filling the evening's programme with this delicate problem in miniature. In the first act we see how a kind-hearted earl befathers his underlings and his excellent butler in particular. Nothing is good enough for them, the honourable young ladies dispense tea to them in the drawing-room, and the superfine young gentlemen carry on conversation with the maids, handing round cakes, while, of course, the difference in rank remains ludicrously apparent all the time. In the second and third acts, when the earl's yacht has stranded on a far-away island, the servants become altogether masters of the situation. Crichton, the admirable butler, asserts himself, and a mess of pottage, combined with the human feeling of hunger, brings all his noble rulers under his sway. He is appointed governor; his word is law, the honourable misses vie

with each other to serve him at table ; all three of them fall in love with him ; one above all forgets her vows to an equal, and is ready to share the better or the worse with him. Crichton, Napoleon of the area, is a conquering hero until, Boom ! a shot from a ship ends the Dorado. At home, in the castle, Crichton returns to his menial duties, the earl and his family resume their dignity, and in the end the butler is quite satisfied to wed his little cockney kitchenmaid, and dream of his greatness in a rural public-house. It is all so unpretentious, so light and airy, so studded with 'plums' of Barrie's amiable humour, that even long *entr'actes*, a speech of Mr. Lestocq about a carpenters' strike, and the fatal hour of midnight, fail to destroy the spell. And then the acting is so perfect, it is such a treat to see Mr. H. B. Irving cutting stage weeds, or having dinner, with Miss Irene Vanbrugh, Miss Sybil Carlisle, Miss Muriel Beaumont, and the vivacious Miss Pattie Brown as waitresses, that one may safely predict a prosperous career. When the curtain fell there was not a single boo ! and rapturous clamours for the author were sent forth until the lights sank low."

POINT OF VIEW NUMBER TWO

" If people had but the courage of their opinions they would admit that Mr. Barrie's flight towards the fantastic is at best but mildly amusing. There is certainly a good deal of pleasant humour in *The Admirable Crichton*, but it is smothered by an avalanche of irrelevant talk, and business no less irrelevant which often savours of the pantomime. Set to music, the curious plot would have all the merits of a tolerable libretto, although, compared with Gilbert's method, Mr. Barrie's betrays a heavy, not to say a clumsy, hand. Probably there is some subtle meaning in the fraternisation of high life with high life below stairs, but I have failed to discover it. Nor can I

confess to much sympathy for a theme in which, on one hand, the manners of the servants' hall are held up to ridicule, and, on the other, we witness highly-born ladies lowering themselves before and currying favour with the butler. When Mr. H. A. Jones wrote *The Lackey's Carnival*—a play that has been far too severely condemned—the question of delicacy was dragged to the fore. Now that Mr. Barrie has his way with the servants' hall nobody protests, and the subject seems to please stalls and gallery alike. Yet the subject remains unsympathetic. It is not delicate to exhibit—in the first act—all the shortcomings of breeding in those who are compelled to do menial service for a living. Nor is it delicate to show how aristocrats debase themselves (and their rank) by toadying to their servants. One may argue the question till the world's end, but good breeding forbids fraternity and something more between a lady and a butler, a gentleman and a maid. In daily life such proceedings would be severely deprecated.

“Having dealt with the main lines of the plot, I come to its elaboration. And here, again, I must own in candour that the play did not please me. For one thing, it is much too long and too overloaded with unnecessary details to be truly amusing. A fantasy, I take it, should be as light as a feather, poetic in its conception ; it should lift us, as it were, beyond the matter-of-fact world of every-day life. In Germany, Ludwig Fulda ; in France, Armand Silvestre and Catulle Mendes ; and in Austria, Dr. Lothar, in *King Harlequin*, have proved themselves masters of this art, while, with us, the latest Empire ballet, *Our Crown*, is a fair specimen of what fantasy really means. But Mr. Barrie, while fantastic in his plot, is not fanciful in his workmanship. Somehow, the thing is farcical in its development, and then only when the author does not linger over ‘business’ (endless mowing of weeds ; cooking of Irish stews ; serving dinner to the butler ; and what not), which hampers the acting and the actors.

Personally I found the play frankly *langweilig*, except when Mr. H. B. Irving, most versatile of our younger actors, held the stage and magnificently differentiated the duality of the butler's character—the menial and the dominator ; or when Miss Pattie Brown, gay and vital as a spark, mimicked the speech and the manners of a cockney kitchenmaid. But even when these two clever artists displayed their splendid *verve*, I felt critical towards the incongruities of the author. Was it necessary to pair this admirable Crichton with a maid in every way so far below his intellectual standard ? Was it necessary to contrast a very lowly type of kitchenmaid with refined society ? It may all be very funny—it may be due to my denseness that I did not find it so. There is no accounting for taste.

“ Liberty, equality, fraternity are all very well, but there is a limit. And I for one do not relish the fantasy of an earl's daughters hero-worshipping the butler ! ” That is my point of view.

THEATRE METROPOLE :

"A MARRIED WOMAN"

A PLAY BY FREDERICK FENN

NOVEMBER 30, 1902

MR. FREDERICK FENN is one of the new generation, and I think that his first energetic but unpretentious knock at the dramatic door should be welcomed with a cordial "Come in." For what we want in our dramatic literature is not mere excellence of workmanship, which Mr. Fenn has yet to acquire, but brain power. And whether his play be right or wrong in its ethical aspect, the fact is undeniable that it contains the intentions of earnestness and the fruit of ample reflection. Personally, I think that our author is as yet more courageous than steeped in such wisdom of the world as warrants a well-balanced treatment of the knotty matrimonial problem. His whys are stronger than his wherefores. He is more adroit in proposing than in solving his questions. But that is a happy defect of youth, and (alas! that it must be so) it lessens every day with the progress of age. The main point, however, is that Mr. Fenn not merely works in the stuffy atmosphere of stage walls and stage traditions, but that he looks about in the world we live in and endeavours to summarise some of his observations in a fairly acceptable dramatic form, adorned by a certain sense of style which raises his dialogue above the commonplace.

Where Mr. Fenn is unconvincing is in his exposition,

or I should rather say, the preparation of his coming events; in the hazy portrayal of one of his main characters; in the supposition that we playgoers are to be bamboozled by make-believes; finally, in the solution of his conflict which is no solution at all, but merely a patched-up affair to secure a temporary peace with honour.

All this implies that there is something wrong with the psychology of the drama.

We have here the *impasse* of a disharmonious marriage. The wife seems sensitive, and talks mild, idealistic philosophy: the husband seems matter of fact, slightly nonchalant, perhaps—although it is not proven—somewhat shaky in his morals. On the Continent such folk, who squabble or do not understand one another, and find a voluntary separation neither effective nor radical, would easily divorce on the plea of incompatibility of temperament. Here, where a sapient if not well-advised Legislature has decreed draconic divorce laws, which inflict disgrace on the losing party, ill-assorted couples often drag along their chain in order to avoid scandal and ostracism. The situation is not novel, and it is even less extraordinary that a third party should be butterflying round the unhappy wife.

But what is indeed novel and very extraordinary is the manner in which the wife tries to circumvent the restrictions of her position. She masquerades as a man *à la* Ursula; she succeeds—thanks to the excellent acting of that section of the part by Miss Beryl Faber—in doing pretty much as she likes, and in deceiving her surroundings until—well, until by a trick the suspecting husband discovers her in compromising circumstances with her would-be lover. Surely this travesty is beyond the dreams of fairyland in this year of grace 1902, and if Mr. Fenn points to the sailor-girl who played the part of a boy for eighteen months, I can but point out to him that what might be possible when a

girl is eighteen is scarcely acceptable in a full-grown woman of thirty or thereabouts.

And now as to the solution. In the first place I must own that our sympathies are with the man in spite of all his failings. We do not really know what is wrong with this man. He has some of the brutality of the notorious Mr. Daventry, he seeks solace in the cup when his wife denies his conjugal rights, and we are not convinced that he is a "bad lot." Rather the reverse; he seems a man of strong character, strong will, strong passion—the sort of man who would, if need be, conquer a woman's love by main force. Remember the words of the great French dramatist, "Il m'a frappé, je l'aime." He does not deserve the aversion of his wife, who is not a little fatiguing with her philosophical meanderings and eccentric ways. In the last act the wife vehemently protests not only her mental aversion from her husband, but she even professes in no uncertain manner physical repugnance. And yet in the end they make it up, and will start life anew in double harness. I contend that people don't do such things. Friction of mind is curable if soothed by other attractions, but physical dislike is beyond remedy. In such unhappiness man and woman never come together, they drift asunder. But when all is said, the play has great merits, for it reveals dramatic instinct and—thank you, Mr. Fenn!—it gives us something to ponder over, to discuss, something to carry home instead of the usual empty hand as requital for our patience.

A Married Woman might have been better acted, and if all had stood on the same high plane as Mr. Titheradge, who played the husband, the play would have made a much deeper impression. Mr. Titheradge's characterisation was fine and powerful. It was even sober in a difficult scene of intoxication. Here, in a dangerous situation, the actor was poignant and moving, where drunkenness as a rule is repellent and often

ludicrous. Miss Beryl Faber, as I said above, was excellent in male attire, but as the woman she failed to rouse our feelings. Her words, exquisitely spoken, sound well enough, but they create no emotion. Our feelings did not go out to the wife, she rather chilled them. I may be mistaken, for a first night before a suburban audience none too serious or appreciative, is a great trial and a bad test, but I think that Miss Faber's force lies in "character-acting," not in emotional parts. The personality is winsome enough, the effort is apparent, but the voice does not carry conviction ; it is fine, but tearless. In the character of a woman with modern ideas and modern manners—yesterday we would have called her a "new woman"—Miss Edith Craig was very interesting and fairly effective. Her enunciation is far from perfect, but her intellectual conception of every line is so palpable, that one listens with pleasure even though one does not always catch the words. I should like to see *A Married Woman* in other surroundings, perfectly cast, and before a special audience of people who appreciate a play of serious intentions. Its faults lie on the surface, but intrinsically I fancy there are more merits than have thus far met the eye.

HAYMARKET THEATRE: "THE UNFORESEEN"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY ROBERT MARSHALL

DECEMBER 7, 1902

I

It may be intentional or merely fortuitous that Mr. Robert Marshall's recent collaboration with the late Eugène Scribe has influenced his new play *The Unforeseen*, but the fact remains that his work has some of the qualities, and more of the faults, of that once famous playwright of France. Involuntarily, when a gold chain was used as circumstantial evidence against the guiltless heroine, the recollection of Scribe's masterpiece, *Une Chaine*, forced itself upon the memory. And the more vividly the recollection possessed me, the more doleful became the reflection that one of our newest playwrights is still in the rearguard of conventionalism when compared with a Parisian whose glories are now generally (but not justly) considered effete.

The least objection against *The Unforeseen* is that it is a mixture of treacle and honey—that sort of honey which comes from California, and is artificially sugared for the sake of preservation. After all, Mr. Marshall, as a purveyor-in-chief to the Haymarket, knows his customers, who are wont to expect slender emotions dulcified with gentility of manner and speech. Nor does Mr. Marshall deserve much blame for his trade in

cheap epigrams. Ever since Oscar Wilde, the master-wit, ascended the boards, epigram has been the inevitable companion of our modern plays. It is a mere decoration. It has nothing to do with the play, it does not spring from the inner men of the characters; you could not say about it, "du choc des opinions jaillit la vérité." There is neither brain-stuff nor truth in these mild sallies, which every man of some intellect can manufacture over a cup of wine, or easier still (this is my Santa Claus gift to our dramatists!) may purchase wholesale in Paris for 3.50fr. in the shape of "*Le Livre d'Or de la Comtesse Diane*." But epigram serves; it is still a sort of fashion, and it will last and make us laugh until another Gilbert or Anstey knocks it down like a row of ninepins. Epigram is not the characteristic humour of our country, it is its humorous affectation.

II

There are more cogent reasons for my meagre interest in this play of Mr. Marshall's. Its foundations are weak, and building on such a basis the whole structure must needs totter. Only at the Haymarket, the most popular, the most amiably managed theatre of London, could such a play pass muster; only the name of Captain Marshall—with Mr. Barrie, *enfant chéri* of the middle-class and the critics alike, could make a good clearance for such a cargo. Elsewhere, and written by another pen, it would have been condemned as good-natured amateur work, with a gleam of promise. For there is no real heartfelt drama in it. Drama does not merely mean progressive action, it means also conflict, and to establish a conflict there must be a cause. There is no cause in *The Unforeseen*. No one can persuade me that there is anything wrong in the innocent fact that an engaged young couple, on the eve of secret marriage, find themselves in a Paris hotel in what one calls adjoin-

ing rooms, because the city is filled to overflowing on account of the Czar's visit. You will say that it is naïve that these people should have found no other separate rooms in the metropolis. So it is, but *naïveté* is the privilege and the Achilles-heel of our dramatists. Let us go on. A couple of friends, quite by accident you know, turn up to shake hands with the young swain whom they have seen *en passant* in the streets. One of them is an officer, the other is a curate with weak eyes. Make a note of those eyes! These visitors are unwelcome, and as the *fiancé* places more reliance on prevarication than on the trustworthiness of his friends, he proclaims that the lady is his wife—a statement which is received with a wink of incredulity. What happens afterwards in that act is good conventional drama; a bank failure makes the marriage impossible, the young lady regains her freedom, and her wooer writes a letter previous to settling his fate with a pistol.

But these details are wholly immaterial. The point is: Was there any just cause or motive for the heroine to live in mental terror because she had passed an hour with her *fiancé* in an ante-room, and he had foolishly called her his wife before the knot had been actually tied? Instead of answering, I will relate the sequel. Four years go by, the lady has become engaged to and marries the curate, and his weak eyes, now almost dimmed, never see in her the lady of the hotel. Of course, the officer, enriched with an inherited fortune and a new name, also appears on the scene. The poor heroine agonises under the troubling terror of Damocles' sword. And that sword falls. The weak eyes are by a skilful operator's hand freed from their scales, the parson sees and recognises, and then the godly man lays on. Two years she has lived with him a living lie, two years this and two years that. Now what can the poor lady do? There is, as I mentioned before, circumstantial evidence to convict her, but there is nothing except her heartbroken protestations to refute the accu-

sation. It is an unfortunate dilemma, and there is but one way out of it. That is, of course, a simple explanation by the wife, relying on her innocence, relying on the love of her husband, relying on the gentlemanly feeling of his friend the officer. But our dramatists have no faith in the eternal flame of truth. They scorn it because it is not theatrical—because it is too true. So a letter turns up, a letter from the dead man's hand, which has made a little trip round the world—and when it tells its tale of exculpation, the parson bends his knee to worship her whom he had wronged, and she kisses and makes it up. *Finis*. Pretty, is it not? “Awfully nice!” and the rest. Yes, but *awfully* untrue from beginning to end, if you can but place yourself in the situation of the characters. Would any man of honour—and a clergyman into the bargain—decline to hear the wife of his bosom when hazy aspersions are cast upon her fame? Would any woman, with a conscience lily-fair, and a heart full of love for her husband, allow such an incident to discomfort their hearth when a few firm words would lay the difficulty? Would, lastly, any wife instantly forgive the husband who, on mere suspicion, had rent her tenderest feelings to tatters, branded her as a liar, and cast her off? That is not for me to argue, I merely sum up. But this I may add by way of guiding your verdict. In life these things do not occur—at least, not in the manner presented by our playwright. They happen in the novelette and on our stage, neither of which has as yet made good its claim to hold a mirror up to nature.

III

So it was all very pretty and pretty unconvincing, and prettily acted it was too. The execution fitted the conception. Miss Evelyn Millard endowed the heroine with beauty (Titianesque beauty, which was strangely

and unnecessarily animadverted upon in the dialogue), with sweetness, and with as much sincerity as she can flash across the footlights. Miss Millard is an actress of possibilities, not, so far, of memorable achievements. She has not found her ground yet. I think it lies rather in the poetic sphere than in the more exacting domain of modern life. Mr. Eric Lewis, as a general who has the exquisite taste to tell a spinster that she looks younger than she is, was the Mr. Eric Lewis we know since first we saw him in *In Town*, always correct, always neat and spruce, always the same; people like him. Mr. Cyril Maude was also quite himself. He paints these water colours of Dutch haziness with a delicate brush. His personality, his diction, are, let me say, winsome, for want of a better word. One even forgives him, in the *scène à faire*, when the parson has to express his *Peccavi*, for falling slightly below the powerful mark of the situation. Mr. C. M. Hallard, in the most ungrateful task of all, that of the *fiancé* in the first act, struck the right chord. At first we ascribed his restlessness to nerves, but as the act developed we learned to appreciate it as a forecast of coming events. It was very clever, very apposite; it saved the situation, and condoned the selfish words which the author saw fit to put into the character's mouth. But the most striking impersonation of the evening was the juvenile of Mr. A. E. Matthews. As a rule, these *enfants terribles* are a nuisance, and terribly difficult to act. Mr. Matthews, however, full of spirit and unconscious humour, vitalised the caricature. His natural humour was a contrast to the artificiality of needless gloom and laboured epigram. He wafted a gust of breeziness into a pretty world of marionettes.

CORONET THEATRE : "THE FLY ON THE WHEEL"

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS, BY MAX BEERBOHM
AND MURRAY CARSON

DECEMBER 7, 1902

It was late in the day when at length a satisfactory answer silenced the irrepressible question, "What does it all mean?" Just before the curtain fell upon the loving union of the treasure-seekers, an Indian native, up to this point apparently mute, unsealed his lips, and explained in parabolic language that the greatest treasure on earth is the discovery and possession of a good woman's heart. So we had listened to a fairy tale, and the air of unreality which puzzled us all the time was justified by the apologia. That was, of course, a great relief, but it did not quite indemnify us for our trouble wasted in speculation, and our time occupied by interminable dialogues which seemed to revolve on their own axis and get no further. We had come to hear a play, and no sooner did it begin than we discovered that, as a matter of fact, there was no composition of plot and character, but merely a series of conversations culminating tardily, in a poetic "*envoi*," to say nothing of three prospective marriages.

This strange manifestation of originality and want of preparation were fatal as far as interest was concerned. I, for one, overcome, no doubt, by the clumsy arrange-

ment which allowed a military band to waste half an hour on the stage with unexciting operatic selections, gently swooned into the arms of Morpheus, while in the first act Miss Esmé Beringer and Mr. Murray Carson analysed their souls in solemn, somnolent effusions. Yet heaven is my witness that my colleague, Max Beerbohm, is one of the few whom I would listen to at the expense of midnight oil!

I therefore contend that, apart from its amateurish construction, which rather surprised me with so deft a craftsman as Mr. Murray Carson as collaborator, there must be something amiss with the play. And I believe it to be this. The authors, clever men both, thought that it would be good fun to have their way with the audience. They would "shake us up a bit." There are two ways of doing that—the one is direct, the other employs stratagem. They chose the latter. Thus they called their play a comedy, while actually it is a fairy-tale-farce. They disowned all the laws which the drama's patrons lay down. Thus—I still believe that it was sheer "cussedness" and not *faute de mieux*—they allotted the greater half of the dialogue to the comic servants and the lesser to the masters. Thus they played fast and loose with their hearers by mingling feeble slang with the most neatly phrased English that one may expect on our undistinguished boards. It was altogether very magnificent in its broken-pillared, azure-skyed, gold-and-diamond-glistening scenery, but—it was not a play. It was a nice *charade en action* (if the present generation can understand the subtlety of that once popular drawing-room game), somewhat tame at the start, crisper towards the middle, best at the belated finish.

And now I should like to hear what Max Beerbohm, much riper, much profounder, nowadays than when *The Fly on the Wheel* was first associated with his name, has to say about this stripling of his nonage. I fancy—I modestly fancy—that he will agree with me.

On paper, without a doubt, well written as it is, the chain of dialogues will be most agreeable reading, but on the stage it lacks that which renders a play vital—concentration, conciseness, consistency. Under these circumstances the actors had no easy task to remain on the alert, and it is not their fault that we have no very definite impression of individual efforts, except on the part of Miss Helen Ferrers, who was vastly entertaining with her superfine manners and manner of speech of an ambitious ladies' maid. The others—I refer to Miss Esmé Beringer, Miss Winifred Jones, Mr. Murray Carson, Mr. Cecil Ramsey, Mr. Eugene Mayeur, and Mr. Hubert Carter—can only be praised *en bloc*. They had merely to talk, but they talked well about many things in general and nothing very much in particular.

GARRICK THEATRE : "THE WATER-BABIES"

AN ADAPTATION IN THREE ACTS OF KINGSLEY'S
BOOK, BY RUTLAND BARRINGTON

DECEMBER 21, 1902

THE dramatic fairy-tale is still in its infancy in this country, but it is gradually learning how to walk and to hold its own *versus* the old-time pantomime. At present the battle between these two rivals for the supremacy at Christmas-time is still unequal. The fairy-tale has modestly to be satisfied with matinées, while the older sister rules over both the mornings and the evenings. Still, it is becoming more and more popular, and occasionally an independent spirit ventures to say, "Well, this beats pantomime; it is, at least, coherent, and there is more taste than display." I overheard this remark at the Garrick, and it pleased me, for, to tell you the truth, I am never so happy as when I can be a child in Fairy Land. After all, life is so awfully serious that it seems like an oasis to live for a few hours in a state of mental irresponsibility, to believe all manner of tales and wonders, albeit they are unfolded in lurid colours and with obvious exaggeration. But on such occasions one must not be critical, and, above all, not view with too critical eyes that which is intended for the eager imagination of unsophisticated

childhood. If I did really assume the toga of the austere dramatic critic, I should ask how much of Kingsley's book has got lost in transit, in how far the language has lost its literary flavour, and how one is to justify the suicide of little Tom. I should also have something to say about the all too facile humour of the play and the none too effective conclusion. But I imagine for the nonce that my little heir-apparent (if I had one) is my adviser, and that his voice is the more competent. Thus I let him beguile me into the belief that the tale of the water-babies is very well told. That the new water-babe, Tom, is the nicest, nimblest, comeliest boy that ever walked—a great compliment for Miss Nellie Bowman, another of Mr. Ben Greet's young recruits. And that there is a very wholesome lesson in the fairy-tale wherein the little ones are forewarned never to be naughty, never to steal sweets, for every sin, large or small, must be expiated by hard work before it can be forgiven. Besides, my childlike-ego tells me that Mr. Bouchier has clad the story in oh! such lovely clothes, and that there are lots of nice little girls on the stage who dance as nicely as they sing. For myself I will add that I most particularly endorse the latter part of this verdict. The children, no less than the grown-up people, did their business so naturally that I cannot refrain from offering my tribute to Messrs. Alexander Stuart and Fred Farren, the stage-manager and dancing-master, the former of whom has moreover supplied the very pretty designs of the now rustic, now submarine, scenery, and the unpretentious but tasteful costumes. I am not so well pleased with the music, although its easy suitability to young minds is beyond dispute. It is simple enough in its way, but it is too familiar in its descent. The whole musical-comedy clan from Caryll up and downwards has contributed to it. Best of all was, perhaps, the prologue, charmingly sung by Miss Constance Courtney, who, seated in a crescent, recalled the well-known picture, "Night." But there is

no need for further details. It is a pleasant entertainment, and you may rest assured that, in the advertising language of a famous food for infants, "Children like it."

ADELPHI THEATRE: "THE CHRISTIAN KING, OR ALFRED OF ENGLE-LAND "

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS, BY WILSON BARRETT

DECEMBER 21, 1902

THE PLAY'S LITERARY EXPRESSION

Alfred issued a number of books for the instruction of his people, and in many has recorded his opinions relating to various subjects connected with philosophy, religion, law, the State, &c. From these and other sources of information accessible to us we are able to form a very good opinion of the style or mode of expression favoured by Alfred and consistent with the literature and learning of the period.

The style of literary expression used in the play will be judged excellent or not in so far as it comes near to or diverges from this opinion.

A LITTLE leaflet is a dangerous thing. It is apt to write somebody down a D—ogberry. This time I am he. For I "diverge" wholly, heartily, emphatically from Mr. Wilson Barrett. I go further. I wager Mr. Barrett a new hat—a dearer hat even than the brass one with the blue plumes which he wears in the second act, a *chef d'œuvre* worthy of Madame Louise or Maison de Cram—that the late great Alfred never uttered one single sentence in the style of Mr. Wilson Barrett. A Rosebery may approach Alfred the Great, but no common mortal can approach Mr. Wilson Barrett—

actor, author, historian, lay preacher, panegyrist of Greater Britain. Mr. Barrett is unique, and whatever is touched by his powerful personality is metamorphosed into a mere molecule of a great entity.

That has been the case with Alfred the Great as handled on the stage by the author of *The Sign of the Cross*, *The Daughters of Babylon*, and *Man and His Maker* in fine scriptural texts popularised and illustrated for provincial and colonial consumption.

This Alfred, King of Engle-land—(let no one dare to write England nor speak otherwise than of children or betrothal—the *accent grave* on the first or last syllable is a peculiarity of style)—this Alfred is not the King of history. He is the King of Wilson Barrett. The microbe of Jingoism rages in him. "For every ship built by a foreign land, build two," says the good man, to shame C.-B. and other little Engle-landers. Engle-land, in a long speech at the close, previous to a *tableau vivant*, is the highway of culture, the pathway of commerce, the this and that way of something else. Good old Engle-land has, in fact, a lot to do to live up to its reputation and its political programme. The spark divine is also in our Alfred. I counted as best I could, and ninety-seven times did I hear Alfred invoke the name divine. Quite enough for one commercial drama, don't you think? And besides that there was enough sermonising to move a myriad of savage breasts, both on the stage and off. The flame poetic also glows in Alfred's bosom. Metaphors drop like heavenly manna from his lips, and when he speaks of women falling like ripe plums (large plums they must be!) in a man's arms, the house was simply dumfounded by the audacity of the picture. Then Alfred is musical, and foolhardy enough to make the late-lamented Marcus Curtius green with envy. He actually goes unarmed and unaccompanied into the Danish enemy's camp and faces the heathen King, "whose loathsome touch," according to Princess Zebuda, "would pollute her

sweet body." And there, in the very lion's mouth, he sings to his blonde queen and to his dark *ex-chère amie* "A wandering minstrel I," to the accompaniment of a lyre and the words which a wandering minstrel may, or may not, have sung in those days. Moreover, Alfred—naughty, naughty Alfred!—is very human in one respect. He loves the girls. And his taste is catholic—as good Christians were in those days. First it is the dark-locked Zebuda, next—very soon after, oh! the flirt!—the fair-crowned, lily-skinned Elswitha. And a very pretty picture he looks in this background of black and white. Only he was not quite fair to the dark girl whom he discarded, after much caressing and cajoling, for reasons of State. That was not very kingly, and certainly not great. I even doubt whether the love scene with Zebuda is quite proper; but that is the Censor's business. If I mention it, it is because I feel disappointed to see the great King belying his reputation, for that is the worst of the play. It attacks a great subject. It purports to bring home to the people the exalted figure of our one King of the dark ages who contributed something to the foundations of a glorious Empire. And in the execution of that scheme all the greatness vanishes. The King is a phrase-maker; the King is a wind-bag; the King is a *poseur*; the King is a sort of twopenny tube for rapid transmission of patriotic clap-trap, of religious bombast, of cheap melodramatic ware and unimpressive *tableaux-vivants*, of the whole stock, lock, and barrel (including cheap humour) which has practically killed melodrama in London's West End. I do not deny for one moment that the thing is dexterously done; that provincial pits and galleries will rise to it like one man; that the Antipodes will swallow it; that it will coin more money than an African mine. But from an artistic point of view (may I be forgiven for using the word in this connection) the play is to be condemned *sans phrase*. It behoves us to be jealous of our great historical figures,

and when they are lowered from their pedestals we are entitled to cry, "Hands off!" Mr. Barrett should use his talents to better purpose. These concoctions, semi-religious, semi-historical, are disagreeable, because they spoil the taste of the public. Great subjects demand great execution; to treat them otherwise is to tamper with the nation's dearest possession.

The play was acted as it deserves. "Ranting" raged all round; and in that atmosphere of wild exaggeration the sweet and tender simplicity of Miss Edyth Latimer as Elswitha and the buoyant gaiety of Miss Alice Crawford as a bonny Saxon maid came like a breath of common sense in a maze of perplexing bathos. Mr. Wilson Barrett was himself. He shouted lustily; his manliness amalgamated picturesquely with the bloneness of Miss Latimer and the southern beauty of Miss Lillah McCarthy; his costumes and his resplendent helmets were sublime. He was every inch a king—the king of his own play.

LYRIC THEATRE: "OTHELLO"

DECEMBER 21, 1902

I

It has been my good fortune to enjoy *Othello* under what I may fitly call the most-favoured-nation clause. On the first night duty called me elsewhere, so I saw it on the third, when all was smooth, and there was none of the nervous strain which sometimes makes, but oftener mars, a great effort in the supreme hour. Let me say that having glanced at the conflicting verdicts of my colleagues, I went to the theatre with little eagerness. It was averred that *Othello* lacked strength, and as strength of purpose and of passion form the dominating features of the character, I feared lest Mr. Robertson might not wholly succeed in *Othello* and repeat the experience of *Macbeth*. Nor did the opening scenes remove this anxiety. The white, flowing robe and the turban on Mr. Robertson's picturesque head did not enhance his robustness, it tended to soften the severity of its expression; and when he began to speak in defence of his marriage, there was no conviction, there was apology. This gentle Moor seemed to crave pardon for his very existence; he was weak after having done a brave deed. Thus it continued until the play, which in this version does not really begin until well into the second act, verged towards tragedy. As soon as the green-eyed monster had Othello in its clutches, the tiger awoke in the man. From now onward the very per-

sonality of the artist seemed to change. Jealousy overwhelmed him like a rising tide—not all of a sudden, not violently nor melodramatically, but as the waters do when they lappingly, gently, but relentlessly annex the shore. There was constant evidence of struggle in Mr. Robertson's conception. It was a mortal strife between love and jealousy, between confidence and suspicion. The eyes alone spoke volumes, they dilated and fulgurated, but the lips, quivering with pain, tried to smile across the seething passion. It was an Othello ferocious and tender alike; it was also Othello in whom at times a spark of humour seemed to deride the upheaval of baseless frenzy. I can imagine an Othello more awe-inspiring by the roar of his voice, more oriental in his felinity, more bloodthirsty with strained eyes that see red; but I cannot imagine an Othello more human. And I have seen all the great Othellos of my time from Salvini—the king of them all by his birthright under Southern suns—to Ernst Possart, the most consummate *actor* (in the word's real sense), whose oratory was as iridescent as his heart was frigid. If I am to class Robertson's creation, I would call it the most human Othello of the age. He does not harrow us, he does not freeze the blood in our veins, but stirs in us the feeling which makes all men kin. It is the feeling of commiseration in its most exalted form. Yes, the Moor, blanched almost by the undefiled whiteness of his childish soul, moves the inner man. He intensifies the tragedy because he mellows it. He thereby enhances the greatness of the play. Some people call *Othello* a melodrama, because the lesser lights of the dramatic profession often obscure the psychological depth of the play by superficial rant. But, indeed, I venture to submit, *Othello* is one of the greatest of Shakespeare's plays, because it is the simplest, the truest—because it is the tragedy that approaches us all. To see Othello played by a great artist like Robertson is to realise to the full the terror, the

cruelty, the malady of jealousy. On a mere nothing, a handkerchief dropped *en passant* (a motive which has become the fountain-head of the best plays Sardou and his school ever wrote), there stumbles and falls the happiness of two human hearts. The woman may be as innocent as a child; she may look like Miss Gertrude Elliott, a Madonna come to life; she may, by the glance of her eye, the timbre of her voice, literally incarnate virginity of mind—yet the man sees it not. Jealousy, the blinder, the flayer, the destroyer, the murderer of both body and soul, is the cancer of the human mind. You may attack it; you may set the knife into it and cut affected parts away; but you can only stay, you cannot stem, the progress of the scourge. And Shakespeare has crystallised it in his great work beyond further discussion. *Othello* is the elegy of mankind's incurable enemy.

II

Beyond giving praise to Miss Gertrude Elliott's beautiful, exquisitely feminine, touching Desdemona, and Miss Lena Ashwell's Julia—an impersonation so consistently strong and, if the word were applicable, so chivalrous and poetic that we may welcome in her a valuable Shakespeare player—and appreciating, if not quite endorsing, the modernised readings of Mr. Ben Webster as Cassio, and Mr. Graham Browne, as Roderigo, there remains only the part of Iago to be discussed. And I regret to have to dissociate myself entirely from Mr. Herbert Waring's conception, and from his acting. As to the first, if *Othello* is strength and jealousy, Desdemona femininity and innocence, Iago is the amalgamation of cunning and envy. In creating Iago, Shakespeare has established the type of the class of parts which the French call "*intriguants*" and we call, more clumsily, "villains." Iago is the

intriguer incarnate as he flourished perennially on the classic soil of Italy, from the Borgias down to the days preceding the realm's unification. Iago should be as sly as a fox, as gracefully insidious as the diplomatist ("who lies abroad," &c.), as ingratiating, mellow-tongued, falsely humorous, as an up-to-date Judas; and what Mr. Waring gave was none of that. It was the "Swashbuckler" all over again, now and then lightened by would-be-gay touches hailing from *Miss Hobbs*. The truth is that Mr. Waring cannot creep into the classic skin. He does not declaim, he lays down the law; when he has uttered a humorous line he pouches his lips, half lifts his arms, and struts about the stage in seeming self-sufficient satisfaction. He is obvious instead of being imaginative, he is intellectual in a pedagogic way, but there is no evidence of inner resonance. We do not see Iago in him; we see in him a clever modern actor spending his energies on a part which above all requires a passionate personality. That is why Mr. Waring's Iago does not interest nor hold us, and marks no striking contrast to the great figure of Othello.

Under other circumstances our disagreement from Iago would considerably lessen our pleasure. Not so in this case. Desdemona and Julia are so attractive, Othello is so wholly engrossing, that they constitute the play for us. Never mind Iago, never mind all the rest, whether they be good or merely indifferent. We feel the tragedy in the trio that carries it; we feel proud that the great art of Shakespeare has scored in the land of his birth. We wish that all Europe could see Robertson's Othello, a noble second to his *magnum opus* of Hamlet.

“ BETHLEHEM ”

MR. LAURENCE HOUSMAN'S NATIVITY PLAY

DECEMBER 28, 1902

“ UT desint vires tamen est laudanda voluntas.”

It may be so or it may be otherwise, yet the impression remains that *Bethlehem* would not have been written but for Ammergau and *Everyman*. Neither in form nor in conception does it bear the stamp of spontaneity. It is a product of imitation—of solemn, reverent, assimilating imitation. It bears the stamp of Ammergau in its lavish picturesqueness and its reasonably faithful adherence to Scripture; it has derived from *Everyman* the doctrinal spirit which in prologue and epilogue admonishes and exhorts the hearer to realise the importance of the Great Event. Therefore *Bethlehem*, written in sober verse of seeming archaic simplicity, yet not free from modernity and linguistic *tours de force*, has all the outward features of an oratorio. Recited on the concert-platform, by the voices of great singers, accompanied by a puissant chorus and soft string music, it would make a deep impression, no doubt. For if the poet reveals no great power, there is in him something of that naïve faith in his own sincerity which, aided by music, is apt to stir the soul of some men and many women.

But Mr. Housman was in error when he conceived his paraphrase of Scripture in the dramatic form, and he erred yet more when he surrendered his work to the

exuberant imagination of a scenic experimentalist. When I read the play I was with the author, although what he said and the manner of his expression neither enhanced nor even approached the loftiness of his subject ; when next I turned to Matthew ii. and Luke ii.—especially to the latter—I mentally bowed in humble reverence for the inimitable simplicity and the infinite grandeur of the narrative ; when, finally, I sat in the obscured hall at the Imperial Institute, and listened to whisperings and mutterings emanating from a crowd whose aspect was certainly *bizarre*, but neither beautiful nor harmonious, something akin to dismay crept over me. I do not say that the spectacle was profane, although the Gates of Bethlehem recalled a Nuremberg toy-box, and the scene around the Virgin Mary irritated by its pretentious futility of word and action ; but I do say that it was eccentric. In fact, the whole fabric of histrionic paraphernalia pressed into service in order to render dramatic that which was merely recitative, cut into dialogue, played sad havoc with the spirit of reverence that such a play should engender. That is one of the peculiar effects of the moral force of the stage. It either fills the hearer with the milk of human kindness and good-will towards all men, or it sours that milk and provokes silent rebellion. When I came away from *Everyman*, I felt as one chastened, bettered, humanised by a sermon that overwhelmed my whole being. It opened my eyes to the futility of all human vanities. When, at last, the curtain descended upon *Bethlehem*, I heaved a sigh of relief, and, irrepressibly, came the reflection, *Cui bono* ? What had I profited by these speaking *tableaux vivants* ? these water-colours of ultra-modern impressionism ? these rhetorical effects ? some inaudibly, some impressively rendered, but unconvincing withal, because the haze that overhung both canvas and voices dimmed my vision and comprehension. The music alone, beautiful music I thought, in spite of its being marred by the display on the stage,

brought me some comfort, soothed the antagonistic spirit aroused by the spectacle. And then, once more, in the quiet study, I read the second chapter of St. Luke, and what the play had denied me was given to me by the majestic power of the Apostle.

One word in conclusion : I know full well that these opinions are wholly personal. I know that experiments such as this are hailed with approval by certain coteries ever ready to acclaim and to support the extraordinary in art, or to apologise for everything that appeals to the imagination in the guise of religionism. But that does not influence me. My task is to examine the artistic value and the ethical inwardness of the production. And as to this I can but profess my appreciation of Mr. Housman's earnestness and his enthusiasm as a pioneer of a renascent form of art, while demurring at the strange manner in which the ecclesiastic spirit has been wedded to the materialisation of the stage.

FOREIGN PLAYS

DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE :

"THE TWIN SISTER"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY LUDWIG FULDA.
TRANSLATED BY LOUIS N. PARKER

JANUARY 5, 1902

I

FIRST of all let me explain the position which the author of this and other delightful and romantic plays occupies in Germany's world of letters. We, over here, have been very imperfectly introduced, some ten years ago, to Ludwig Fulda by a version of *Der Talisman* which Mr. Parker adapted for Mr. Tree under the title of *Once Upon a Time*. The mutual acquaintance did not start with sympathy at first sight. The play's peculiar flavour had evanesced in the adapter's hands. The action had been cut up for the purposes of the Haymarket, and Mr. Tree's appearance as a disrobed king failed to impress our audience with a sense of the ethereal. Later on the Adelphi produced an unspeakable perversion of Fulda's *Lost Paradise*, and finally his charming comedy *Pals* at our German Theatre met with lukewarm recognition, because in those days one German playhouse was not deemed sufficient for London, and both suffered from the competition.

Londoners have, therefore, but a very faint conception of Fulda's power and position. To sum it up as briefly

as possible, I might relate that he is honoured in his own country as the finest translator of Molière in modern times ; that his dramatic fairy tales are deliciously flavoured with exquisite minor poetry ; that he wields a graceful—almost Gallic—pen of spirited dramatic criticism ; and that altogether his talent forms an amiable blend of the romantic era of yesterday and the realistic current of to-day.

II

The story of *The Twin Sister* deals with the perennial question of the “sister-in-law,” and really flows around the magical powers of a bottle of “golden hair-wash.” In modern language this story would read as follows :

For five years Mr. Orlando, a gentleman of Padua, had lived more or less happily by the side of a charming lady, who bore him a little cherub of a son. After the first lustrum Mr. Orlando began to feel the weight of wedlock, and his fidelity became doubtful, in fact, he graduated with mastery in that time-worn game which modern society calls flirtation. A kiss stealthily, yet not unobservedly, robbed from a menial's lips, only confirmed Giuditta, the virtuous and lovable spouse, in her conviction that her husband's recent conduct would be the forerunner of a domestic catastrophe. So the lady wisely resorted to that most effective feminine weapon—woman's wit, and while apparently going home to mother, she merely indulged in the aurification of her hair, and reappeared on the scene as Renata, the blonder and gayer twin sister. Being an Italian, she was, of course, a consummate actress, and, having found that sentimentality proved boresome to her husband, she transformed her character into girlish sunniness, and enticed her unsuspecting lord into the very game which had threatened her domestic felicity. As the Frenchmen say, “you see it all from here.”

Giuditta had no sooner metamorphosed into Renata than Mr. Orlando fell an easy prey into a neatly woven net. Over head and ears in love with the fair sister, he is quite ready to part with the darker one, but at this critical moment Giuditta conquers Renata; explanations, intensified by a sound little homily, follow, and the foundation-stone is laid for a cloudless "happy ever after."

During the evening, as the play progressed, I heard many comments on this somewhat commonplace little plot. Some people did not find it funny because the question of the other sister frequently invades the homes of contemporaneous society. Others sneered at it because, in their opinion, the whole thing was too fantastic for words. With the former objection I cannot deal, as it is one of a purely personal nature; it may command our sympathy, yet it is entirely foreign to the character of an inoffensive little poetic play. But as to the story being condemned as too fantastic, well, to such criticism there is but one reply—that he who measures the realm of imagination by the iron standard of logic and everyday life is not in the right frame of mind to enjoy the gossamer delicacies of light poetry. Really, the plot and the characterisation of such a play go for very little. The main point is in how far the author has understood how to maintain our interest by the melody of his lyre, and in this respect the original version of the comedy is all that could be desired. Mr. Fulda's poetry may not have eagle wings, it may but flutter gracefully like a butterfly, but as a conceit of fancy it is mightily pleasant to the ear, and contains in the most unpretentious form many a word and line worthy of a thinker and a master of verse. To a certain extent the charm of the play was bound to suffer by transplantation; for to substitute for the rhyme of a foreign language prose-like English blank verse is akin to the exchange of a golden sovereign for a handful of silver. The one is sterling metal of un-

disputed nobility, the other is a somewhat depreciated commodity with a greater face value than intrinsic merit. By this I by no means wish to depreciate Mr. Parker's adaptation, but simply to point out the great initial difficulty with which he had to contend. He has performed his task bravely, and some of the longer passages were strikingly rendered into tuneful, vivid English. Unequal as Mr. Parker is in most of his work, he has not escaped the snare of modernity, and has forgotten that in the days of the Medici one did not use to-day's slang nor express astonishment or dismay by a thoroughbred British "Damn!"

III

At the close of the performance, when author and adapter were called in unanimity, there appeared before the footlights an apologetic gentleman who made a speech and assumed the prerogative which usually belongs to the audience and the critics. This theatrical apparitor-general, after a few courtesies, proceeded to propose votes of thanks for the beautiful play, the excellent performance, and the splendid stage-management. He might have gone a few points further, and praised the cloakroom men who mind our coats for 6*d.*, and the programme ladies who also exact a nimble "tanner" for their wares. It may be the manner of the "Syndicate" to coax the critic into laudation, but I am sure that we are unlikely to be influenced, like many of our American colleagues. In these pages, at least, I shall not refrain from expressing my opinion in candour and to repress, as forcibly as I can, innovations which I consider to be in bad form. Since the spokesman of the authorities of the Duke of York's Theatre has taken it upon himself to praise the stage management of the play, I am indeed sorry to have to differ. The stage-management was not far above the

level to which we have become accustomed, and entirely wanting was that fairy-like touch which rendered that performance at the Lessing Theatre, Berlin, so remarkable, so beautiful to the eye, so joyful to the ear. Here there reigned only as much harmony as the individual actor felt inclined to vouchsafe, and as for the harmony of colour, I had better express nothing, except a reference to the ludicrous ballet-girl-like attire of Mr. Norman Forbes, and, in the first act, the accoutrement of Mr. H. B. Irving, on whose shoulders the symbolic mantle of his distinguished father begins to drape very well. The lighting of the stage, too, lacked fancy, and altogether the question suggests itself whether, when so much money was spent, a little trip to Berlin might not have been thrown into the bargain, for there is a great deal to be learnt there. Lest I should be told that all these matters have nothing to do with stage management, I declare that indeed they have. Particularly in the production of poetic plays, and plays of atmosphere, the stage-manager should not only teach his actors how to play around furniture, but indeed how to bring out the full value of every line. The points that were missed at this first production were so countless that my pencil found no time to annotate them in the German copy.

Apart from details in finesse, I have nothing but praise for the actors, some of whom added charm to a charming play. The evening at least produced a revelation in the triumph of Miss Lily Brayton, and the rise of Mr. H. B. Irving; it also produced disappointment in Mr. Norman Forbes's impersonation of Parapasco—the comedian and not the buffoon of the play. Henceforth Mr. H. B. Irving, who has done good, and some excellent things, will stand in the front rank. His possibilities are great, and he is in every sense unmistakably the son of his father, except in the pronunciation of the language, wherein he affects accents of cockneyism of jarring peculiarity: but that is a

detail. What became apparent on this first night was that Mr. H. B. Irving has powers—greater powers than we have yet fathomed—and that he will be one of the few elect who understand the gentle art of love-making on the stage. His pathos was truly touching ; his outbursts were splendid, though somewhat over exuberant ; his courtship was full of elegance and tenderness. The *Giuditta* of Miss Brayton was also a beautiful performance. The part is difficult and taxes the greatest—the famous Jenny Gross has played it in Germany. Still, Miss Brayton came out of the ordeal with wondrous success. She marked the contrast between the two women with striking colours. We enjoyed her happiness, we felt her natural gaiety with its strong undercurrent of “slimness.” At times Miss Brayton seemed to feel a little over-weighted or fatigued, but, on the whole, she endowed the character with so much grace and fairy-like charm that she may be safely assured of having realised the author’s idea.

WYNDHAM'S THEATRE: TRIPLE BILL

MARCH 2, 1902

I

"CÆSAR'S WIFE" ("L'ENIGME"), BY PAUL HERVIEU

PAUL HERVIEU is a Bismarck among the playwrights of modern France. He is a man of blood and iron; he is merciless in dealing with human weakness; and his style, simple and strong, steers relentlessly ahead, crushing ideals, pulverising idols, and destroying fiction in its one desire to represent the truth as nakedly as art will allow. He is an artist to his finger-tips. His French is, as it were, sculptured in marble. His dialogue is magnificent in its soberness. His characters, drawn with a firm hand, so that each has a well-modelled individuality of its own, are, as it were, "compressed life"—compressed, since the stage forbids the discursiveness of life itself. At times Hervieu loves to moralise, to imbue his creations with a philosophy all his own and tending to drive home a thesis, as, for instance, in *L'Arniature*, in *La Loi de l'Homme*, in that great tragedy *La Course du Flambeau*, in a lesser degree in *L'Enigme*, a work upon which the severest critics of the French have conferred the title of a masterpiece.

In *L'Enigme* the author has achieved that which

constitutes Ibsen's incontestable superiority of method. He has built from material utterly simple a drama wonderfully intense. Yet in one respect he has surpassed the master. There is nothing mysterious in his story or his language. All is crystalline in its clearness. There is no room for excision. Every line is a distinct thread of the woof, and towards the end one single sentence engenders a climax of indisputable power. When the lover has shot himself, and the tidings of his suicide are brought home to the house where the two couples Gougiran live together, the guiltless wife falls into her husband's arms, and the other makes for the door, imploring help, "for he cannot be dead,"—the enigma is solved. Then, and only then, we know who betrayed the marital trust. It was not Giselle, who protested vehemently when the two husbands discussed what they would do if they were deceived, the one vowing vengeance on the faithless wife, the other on the lover. It was Leonore, who had listened quietly, almost inertly, who had dispensed commonplaces, while Giselle with all her might shielded guilt and the guilty. Towards this climax Hervieu has gradated without one moment's deviation; he scorns all theatricality; he scorns love-scenes between lover and mistress. Outwardly there is no sign of understanding between the two. All along there reigns an air of cool urbanity. Even the discussion of the crucial question brought about by a simple newspaper paragraph gives us no definite clue. The advocacy of Giselle is indeed more suspect than the reserve of Leonore; but so dexterous is the author, so woman-of-the-world-like are the two wives that, as the discussion proceeds, we begin to waver; and even in the fateful hour when the lover is under suspicion, no one can guess which is the guilty woman. From our average English point of view there are objections against the verisimilitude of the story. English husbands would not deal with the lover in the circum-

stantial manner depicted by Hervieu. But as this is a French play our scruples carry no weight, no more than does the assertion that the whole story is immoral and unfit to obtain the licence of the Censor, who has indeed demanded sweeping alterations, for neither insular prejudice nor censorial interference can oust the original play from its rank as a work of art, remarkable alike for its style and its daring originality.

II

"HEARD AT THE TELEPHONE," BY ANDRE DE LORDE AND FOLEY

I thought of the Marconi system. I saw foaming waves bounding skywards. I saw the ship battling against the infuriated waters. I saw the crowd on shore watching with quivering hearts and tottering knees for what the instrument at the pole would indicate. And with every click the message "Danger!" drove home the terrible truth of being so near and yet so far. For there was every means of verbal communication; but help was beyond human power. In sight of the harbour the ship was engulfed, and in the terrorised ears of the hapless spectators there sounded a chord as if agonising souls shrieked, "Morituri te salutant." Why did I think of the Marconi system, since De Lorde and Foley tell us quite another story in their overwhelming little play? Simply because this work, even when merely read by the fireside, sets the whole human battery in motion. There is everything in it—tenderness and sadness, awe and gruesomeness, homely pathos and tragedy unspeakable. There is calmness in it, while outside the storm rages, then a hurricane breaks out within, and the force of the infuriated elements is surpassed. It is horrible to see

this man at the telephone, to behold his anguish, to hear him proffer help—help against the murder of his family—to see with one's mental eyes what he hears with his ears. It will haunt our thoughts in our day-dreams and in our slumbers at night. And yet it is not the horror of vulgar sensationalism. It is the horror inspired by a very possible concatenation of circumstances.

Therefore, the invention of this play is a stroke of genius, and worthy of the invention is the treatment. It is Maeterlinck's mystic symbolism materialised into real life, with full-blooded live creatures instead of phantoms, with the atmosphere that daily floats around our existence instead of the mist produced by the exaltation of over-wrought intellect. And, as in Maeterlinck's *Intruder*, the language is peculiarly wedded to the circumstances. From sentence to sentence, short, staccato, spasmodic as they are, the tension waxes, and the nearer it comes to the climax the fewer grow the words, until at length mere ejaculations—monosyllabic some of them—make our hearts leap within us in the face of a fiction which is stranger than truth, yet nowise fantastic.

III

The third item in the programme—literally the curtain-raiser—was an old farce of the "screaming" type, a time-honoured charger of many famous Irish actors, and therefore fitly entrusted to Mr. Leonard Boyne. He succeeded well enough with the public, but his customary first-night nervousness ("pre-microsis") marred a good deal of his fluency and vivacity. At present we can merely guess how very amusing this clever and dashing actor will be anon.

As regards quality, the farce comes at the bottom of the list, but it is a fact that it carried the honours of

the evening. This was due to various causes, which I will pass in rapid examination, for it is not the public's fault that artifice scored off art on this occasion.

The "Telephone" play succeeded fairly well, because its strength is beyond failure, and Mr. Charles Warner's fine melodramatic method would lead a much weaker cause to victory. But with all respect to Mr. Warner, a less boisterous, an impressionist manner would have been more thrilling, if not so violently harrowing. Anguish is not necessarily vociferous, and a sobbing voice touches the heart far more intensely than clamour. But the whole performance was artistically unsatisfactory. Atmosphere was lacking; the voices were not in harmony; while the rain was supposed to dull the sunrays, the room was flooded with light. In the first act the telephonic instrument was so clumsily chosen that Mr. Warner had to speak into the auditorium instead of the receiver, lest all the effect should be missed. In the second act, again, the instrument (the Swedish patent) hid Mr. Warner's mouth and thereby checked his power. Nor was the furniture of the rooms in tenor with the *locale*. There was no weirdness of an old French castle. There were nondescript rooms, with furniture of suburban choice. Why treat these important factors so lightly while Paris is so near and the correct *mise-en-scène* an object of paltry expense? It is all very well to laugh at the *théâtre libre*, its partisans and apostles; but if the plays of Antoine's school are good enough to be produced, his great lessons in stage-management, acting, elocution, are surely worth following. All of which implies that we have seen a version of a famous play, but not the famous production of it. The gulf between the performance at the Théâtre Antoine and Wyndham's Theatre is wider than the Channel.

Cæsar's Wife fared better in English hands, although the Censor did not allow her to pass without reproach. The lady was what the French call *mise en réforme*

her guilt was blanched with chastening powder; flirtation took the place of outspoken faithlessness. The enigma, too, was destroyed, for (read it not, Hervieu!) did he not at the beginning of the second act see the lady's shadow flit across the stage? Still, so strong was the texture that these lacerations scarcely spoiled the interest. Towards the end the conflict fairly held the house, while the first act and part of the second were found tame, since the English version did not equal the terseness of the French dialogue. It is almost impossible to train the English tongue to the glibness of French volubility.

The acting was, on the whole, satisfactory, if not great. The part which stood out in Paris, the old Marquis, stood here upon the second plane. We all like Mr. F. Kerr in his own particular line, but a *raisonneur* and a French Marquis—that is something quite different from an English clubman of heavy gait and deliberate diction. The Leonore of Miss Ashwell was what we expected her to be—a Mrs. Dane with a slight difference, yet interesting, impressive, comely. Miss Fay Davis, too, was interesting and particularly winsome, but I imagine a Gisela of more trenchant force—a “new” woman, fearless of her opinions. The two husbands, represented by Mr. Charles Warner and Mr. Charles Fulton, were both excellent—the very pictures of sport and strength. Yet in some scenes they might have been less violent, for, after all, the actor is but a part of the picture, and a perfect *ensemble* is worth many an individual effort.

“ZAZA” AT THE ROYALTY

MAY 25, 1902

To be unprejudiced, that is the thing. I have seen all the great “Zazas” of the world, and now that I have to deal with one entirely new to me, I must, above all, cleanse the mental slate of reminiscences. But that is not enough. I have to consider that an English “Zaza” can never reach the temperamental fervour of a French, a Belgian, an Austrian, or even of an American woman. Nor may an English “Zaza” let go the reins of freedom as recklessly as a foreigner. The beauty of our language is its stately refinement: if you lower its standard in word and intonation it loses not only its nobility, but it grows coarse, it grates on the ear and shocks the mind.

It is no small task for an actress to remember all that in a part as variegated as the tints of our landscapes. For how to temper against one’s conviction, and how to present frenzied *abandon* in defiance of racial calmness, means a severe test on physique and nervous system alike. Having said all this neither in palliation nor as an apologetic preface, but simply because it is necessary to differentiate instead of wasting time in odious comparisons, I gladly own that Mrs. Lewis Waller’s Zaza has surpassed my most sanguine expectations. I had not seen this actress for years, and I was more than curious to witness the work of time and experience. Well, the limitations of yesterday have almost vanished. Where there was an amiable

gift of speaking nicely, feelingly, yet not convincingly, there has grown power; not the power that causes pangs of pain and halting breath, but the power that commands respect, and in moments thrills by its unfeigned sincerity. Mrs. Waller's conception of Zaza is all her own; she wisely spurns imitation; she has not been drilled by some one more versatile in stage-craft than herself. Her Zaza is Englished, is chastened. She blends, as it were, the Kennington Road with West Central Flatland. She is never coarse, yet often caustic: she glides over thin ice and avoids dangerous breezes. The play improves in character by her acting, and to say that "rats" is the extreme limit of the slang she allows her Zaza, is to convey that a somewhat scabrous theme is softened by tactful discretion. Perhaps in this process the character of Zaza loses something of its magnetism. It also loses its nationality. It is no longer the *quart-mondaine* of the *café chantant*, but has become the half-bred lady of the halls. But in the crucial scene of the play, the rupture of the *liaison* Mrs. Waller fully rises to the occasion. The house applauded her effusion in stormy approval, and if the general feeling was more one of admiration than of tearful emotion, it betokened sincerely enough that here was a histrionic achievement of no mean importance. In Mr. Leonard Boyne the English Zaza found the ideal Dufresne. In all the width and length of the land there is no man so perfectly gifted for the part. When Mr. Boyne is with all his heart in the business, he is second to none as an emotional actor. And evidently he loves his part; his Irish blood makes him revel in these scenes of love and passion. His is a performance overflowing with vitality. His is the *jeune premier* so rare on our stage. Three other artists attracted much attention in a performance of general sufficiency. I refer to the Cascart of Mr. A. E. George, as nearly a Frenchman as an Englishman can be; to Miss Kate Kearney, inimitable as the bibulous, glut-

tonous stage-duenna; to Miss Minnie Rayner, an actress unknown to most of us, but from the first in our good graces because her buxom, harum-scarum servant-girl had the words "such is life" writ large upon her genial personality.

Thus the English *Zaza* has nicely justified its appearance. And if anon comparisons arise, Mrs. Lewis Waller may yet feel proud that her performance will hold its own as a remarkable English interpretation of a world-famed Parisian creation.

THE STAGE SOCIETY: "THE NEW IDOL"

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS, BY FRANÇOIS DE CUREL

MARCH 23, 1902

I

THE fortress of science has, during the last few years, endured many vigorous assaults. Leon A. Daudet, the son of a great father, scourged hospitals and medical men in that clever and horrible book, "Les Moticoles"; Brunetière, hitherto known as the erudite, the amiable, and the temperate, played wholesale havoc with science in its many branches when from the platform he delivered the pronunciamento that "science is bankrupt." Finally, to pass over a few minor onslaughts, François de Curel flung the gauntlet into the camp of the vivisectionists, and for the purpose of his diatribe he chose the most effective *cathedra* of all—the stage.

At the time of its appearance *The New Idol* created a great sensation, for it came at an opportune moment, when the eyes of Paris were turned towards the Institute Pasteur, and the experiments of Dr. Roux had made the expressions "inoculation," "serum," and "immunity," household words. De Curel chose for his text in his denunciation of the "new idol" the words of the doctor's wife, wherewith she stigmatises the medical experiments on patients, maintaining that when

such experiments entail risk of life, the physician may but stake but one life, and that his own. To drive this axiom home with awful power, the author places before us the case of a doctor, studious, and jealous of the glory of his calling to the point of recklessness, who inoculates cancer upon a girl patient whose death from consumption within six months appeared inevitable. When he has done this, and the poison slowly spreads through the victim's body, nature, in that untoward manner which passes the comprehension of man, heals the withering lungs, and the man of science stands before his wife, his colleagues, the world, before his own conscience, convicted of wilful murder. He who had sinned *ad majorem scientiæ gloriam* is now a felon. His intentions go for nothing; he is, in a graver sense, on the plane of the man who attempts great and seemingly impossible deeds. If he succeeds the world pronounces him a giant; if he fails he is called a fool and sometimes a knave. In the doctor's case there was no hope for quarter. The Press denounced him, his colleagues shunned him, the students threatened demonstrations, and if the code of France had provided for such crime, the police would have followed up investigation by trial. In this terrible situation, forsaken by the world and even by his wife, the doctor, a man of heart after all, a man of character, albeit a scientific fanatic, sees but one atonement. He does that which his wife had tauntingly flung at his head in their hour of dissension. He inoculates himself with the same fearful disease to which he had doomed his girl-victim.

II

In selecting this tragedy to introduce to English students a playwright who is a potent personality in the latter-day dramatic revolution of France, the Stage Society has earned a claim to our appreciation. But

granting this, the observation cannot be withheld that the selection, interesting though it was, scarcely explains or justifies the high position of de Curel in his own country. He has done quite different work—work in which we hear not only the controversialist and the pamphleteer, but the artist and the man of letters. I refer to *L'Amour brode* and *Le repas du Lion*, the latter being, so far, his *magnum opus* and the one in which his talent is, as it were, summarised. But he who judges de Curel after seeing *The New Idol* is likely to underestimate his gifts. For to put it shortly, *The New Idol* is not a play, it is a plea. It ranks with Brieux's famous *Avariés*, yet at a lesser altitude, among the dogmatic dramas which have a specific purpose and which have been written in dramatic form merely because dialogue is a more far-reaching method of transmission than the essay. By virtue of this origin the play has merely the outward characteristics of a drama, the personages have but the outward form of individuality. Inwardly they have no life at all; they do not exist, or yes, they do exist, but they are fragments of the author's mind, who has (let me put it so) quartered himself in order to vitalise his plea. This absence of duly individualised drama is evident enough when, in order to sustain the action, the main theme is abandoned for argumentative by-ways. Then the author drags in many subjects, and they are discoursed about as one would imagine doctors holding forth after a professional dinner during a medical congress. There is wandering from topic to topic; the Nancy school of suggestion comes in for comment and bantering criticism; psychology and the human soul are dragged in, and from the soul and the soul-cure an excursion is made into that limitless domain of human discussion, the question of eternity. All this in itself is wonderfully fascinating; it is deep; it is, without brutal wilfulness, annexed to the main theme, with which, however, it does not amalgamate; one feels all along that the

author is a man of many parts, whose knowledge of great problems extends far beyond a smattering. But in this maze of wisdom, of philosophy, of dictatorial sentences, and sententious doctrines, the hearer is nonplussed. He has no time to follow, no time to ponder; relentlessly and without halting for breath, he is dragged from thesis to thesis, from argument to argument, and at length his interest is diverted from the main points. Instead of carrying away a definite idea, one feels as if one had succumbed to the superhuman effort of listening to a cluster of clever people all speaking at the same time. A work of this nature is entrancing and profitable reading; indeed, I remember how the book laid hold of me and filled me with admiration for its brain power. But on the stage, where in the cross-fire of repartee many points naturally flit past the audience, a sheer loss, such scientific polemics cannot but appear unsatisfactory even to those who hold that the theatre is no mere instrument of amusement. Moreover, these dialogues hamper our actors, most of whom are more at home in plays of strong action than in those demanding great fluency and pointedness of diction. It was, therefore, greatly to their credit that the lengthy conversation, the technical discourses on unusual subjects, fared so well at their hands. Above all, besides the pathetic young nurse of Miss Agnes Verity, the two doctors of Mr. C. Aubrey Smith and Mr. Norman McKinnel were remarkable creations. They spoke with all the dignity, the self-possession, the heartfelt conviction of the professional man. And Mr. Aubrey Smith's Doctor Donnat in particular will be remembered as a proof that splendid elocution combined with profound characterisation is not altogether a moribund art.

MAETERLINCK'S "MONNA VANNA"

JUNE 28, 1902

I

"MONNA VANNA" has been placed on the Censor's Index. Why? There is no allusion to Royalty or other contemporaneous personages of public importance. There is no blasphemy. There is no impersonation of scriptural characters. Then there remains but one conclusion. Mr. Redford considers the play detrimental to the morals of the nation. Yet Mr. Redford gives no reasons; he simply forbids, because, presumably, such is his power by virtue of his office. It is eminently a case to be tested, to be fought out to the bitter end in order that, at last, the public and the theatrical managers should know where the possibility of obtaining a licence ends and where licentiousness begins. At present we wallow in darkness and despair. The Russian Holy Synod of the redoubtable Pobiedonocheff could not be more inimical to art and literature than the formidable power that undermines liberty of thought at Stable Yard. And the worst of it is that we do not know where to lodge an appeal. Would else a handful of literary luminaries resort to the *Times* to utter a futile cry in the desert? Evidently Mr. Redford is considered all-powerful. He appears to be beyond the control of the Lord Chamberlain, beyond control of Parliamentary Acts, beyond control of common sense and logic. He may, within the space

of a fortnight allow *La Princesse de Bagdad*, the unclean *Maude*, and forbid *Monna Vanna*. He may give us to understand, without comment, that *Françillon* of Dumas *fils*, which is in its basis similar to *Monna Vanna*, yet infinitely less moral in motive, is innocuous. He may manifest that impropriety in jest (I think of *Kitty Grey*, the farce, and a hundred other besmattered importations from the Boulevards) is wholesome amusement for the crowd. He may burke a masterpiece like *La Visite de Noces*. And in spite of all these contradictions, so flagrant and so absurd, we have to lie low. No Member of Parliament comes to the rescue with an interpellation or a proposal to inquire into the functions of the censorial machine. Things are simply allowed to drift, regardless of protest after protest. For the drama is not considered seriously. Let it go to the dogs, let it muddle through somehow under the grandmotherly patronage of the Lord Chamberlain's office. Who cares but the few? Meanwhile, we are the laughing-stock of all the world, and our dramatic production is, with but rare exceptions, on the infantile level of the nursery, or of the equivocal character commonly associated with the bar and the smoking-room.

II

By its ostracism Maeterlinck's latest play has scored a tremendous *réclame*. Everybody will read it, everybody would run to see it if the Maeterlinck Society—another fine satire on our dramatic system—could be persuaded to prolong the performances at the Victoria Hall, in Bayswater.

If I am to say in candour whether the play is worth all this stir and commotion, I reply, directly, in the negative. I have seen the play in Brussels, at the Monnaie, under excellent circumstances, and I carried away the impression that Maeterlinck's new method is by

no means as fine as that symbolic poetry in prose which startled the world and charmed the epicures of literature. I go further, in defiance of cliques ever ready to acclaim the manifestations of a new idol, and I say that if this play had not borne the famous name of Maeterlinck it would have earned success, but never universal fame. This statement does not imply detraction. It simply purports to reduce ready-made admiration to sensible proportions. Some people are ever prone to adulate the inventor—the one who most times spends other people's money to seek something which he cannot find. They seek theories and artistic principles which are far from the author's mind. Thus I have read about *Monna Vanna* that, in illustrating how that beautiful woman offered her body to save Pisa—yet emerged from the ordeal unscathed, but discredited in the eyes of her liege lord—Maeterlinck means to proclaim new doctrines as to character and destiny. I set but little store on all this finesse of critical research. I hold that Maeterlinck, now in a position to venture, for the sake of winning, married, moreover, to an actress of promising tragic powers, has set to work to write a drama of the accepted formula—a drama that would not merely appeal to the superfine minority, but to that majority which in France knows how to appreciate a good plot, definite characterisation, and dialogue of the most exquisite tissue.

Therefore, in this direction, Maeterlinck tried a maiden effort, which has very nearly become a masterpiece. What makes *Monna Vanna* is the moral grandeur of its conception, the tragic fate which links the heroine to her would-be lover, the delicate woof of the thought-laden language, every skein of whose long-spun threads is so rhythmic that its harmony almost condones its superfluity of wealth. What mars the drama is the smallness of its compass, the wordiness of the character behind whom the author shelters and manipulates as a wire-puller, the reiteration of situation

after situation ; last, but not least, the lameness of the conclusion. Monna Vanna remains a creature, grand and splendid, until the crucial point when, before the incredulity of her husband, her sense of duty falters and the lover carries the day. Then she is no longer a heroine of tragedy ; then she steps a few paces downward, and ranks with the *revoltées* and the *incomprises* of modern life. Still, it would be ungracious to lay this deterioration at the door of Maeterlinck, the thinker. It is Maeterlinck the builder who is at fault. In obeying the canons of the drama of the stage, he butted against the most difficult obstacle of all—the determining scene upon which a play hinges. And in his inability to cope with it, he cast his premises and his ethics to the winds.

I could urge many other points for and against, but those which I have enumerated are vital. If the story of *Monna Vanna* is fraught with painful undercurrents, it is likewise chastened by a sincerity of treatment and a grace of language which would lift the most scabrous subject above the reproach of coarseness.

But as a drama it rises neither above nor does it fall below, the mean of French ability. Read Vasquerie's *Formosa*, read Coppée's *Pour la Couronne*—to name but two on the second plane of poetry, yet on the same plan of conception—and you will endorse this finding.

‘ LES DEUX ÉCOLES,’ BY CAPUS

JULY 27, 1902

I

CAPUS is the playwright of the hour in Paris, and he deserves it. He works uphill, and in his particular province, in comedy, he strives to attain the summit. If *La Bourse ou la Vie* was good, *La Petite Fonctionnaire*, which followed *La Veine*, but was of older coinage, was better ; if *La Veine* is a fine mixture of jest and earnest, *Les Deux Écoles* is comedy in the sense in which we love and understand it best. Of course, if you judge *Les Deux Écoles*, Gallic and Parisian to the core, by the standard of what we Londoners preach (but not always practise) as “propriety,” we may as well at once cease arguing. For in the ordinary English sense of that word, which taboos conversation on marital irregularities, yet retails them with savour in the newspapers, the play is distinctly not proper, for its *leit-motif* is infidelity. But there is a wide gulf between the candour and the humour of comedy and the insinuating allusions in the ordinary French farce. The former tackles a burning question boldly, is upright if it is not flattering ; the other has but the one aim—to excite laughter at the expense of good manners. Wherefore the one may not be proper, yet it is not immoral ; while the other is immoral by the exaggeration of its impropriety. And then there is this to be observed. Capus, in *Les Deux Écoles*, has not merely jotted down a play in the free-

and-easy manner which means nothing to a facile French pen. He has done, in a different key and in modern form, what Sardou, Dumas, and particularly Meilhac and Pailleron (*Le Monde ou l'on s'ennuie*) have done in the eighties. Only Sardou and Dumas while writing kept one eye steadily on their plays' adaptability to France and all other climes, while Meilhac, Pailleron, and now Capus, have paid no heed to the universe, but merely written for Paris Parisiennant—for Paris of the Parisians. That is why Meilhac and Capus are impossible in English, while Pailleron has become possible to the cosmopolitan section only of the London public.

Now, what is it that Capus has done in *Les Deux Écoles* to render it so exclusively Parisian and so exquisitely amusing? It goes without saying that he masters the technique, that he writes French with that undulating fluency of grace which turns a language into an enchantress, that he is not merely a wit but a humorist. All these great qualities combined may make an excellent play, but not one of enduring vitality. In order to live a comedy must be strongly cemented on an *arrière pensée*; there must be "something in it"; it must be characteristic of a period. And that is precisely the case of *Les Deux Écoles*. That its title is justified by the evolution, in which it is very clearly and logically demonstrated that most men are polygamous by nature, and that, *au fond*, the warm-blooded, light-hearted, bright and intelligent Squire of Dames is preferable to the whited sepulchre of faultless outward correctness—that is but a point of minor importance. The real value of the play is in its faultless observation and reproduction, not merely of one, but of a series of contemporaneous types. We may not feel pleased that in the upper middle-class the sacramental obligations of wedlock are thus violated. One may fling one's arms aloft and rejoice that in our circle and country things are different and healthier.

But that is merely the reflection of a narrow horizon. It is not for us to indulge in idle talk about the world as we would like it to be ; no, when a phase of life, a class of people, a concatenation of circumstances are placed before our eyes, our sole concern is to inquire into verisimilitude and accuracy of observation. And to say that Capus is an assimilating mind of "biographical" minuteness, but that he paints in live colours instead of the mere black and white of photography, is merely to echo what every competent French critic has already said. Take every character in the play, the husband, the wife—strong, yet woman, in spite of her strength ; the elderly couple, both mature and seasoned, yet a perfect counterpart to the former ; take the whiskered, highly respectable specimen of officialdom and formality ; the little canaille of low descent, ill-breeding, and light morals. Behold them all, both in their home and in public, observe the distinctions peculiar to every one of them, and you cannot deny that here is a true fragment of Paris day by day. Of course Capus accentuates to the point of exaggeration. He lays his colour on with the bold, mellow stroke of the impressionist. He lets every character speak with his tongue in his cheek and a merry twinkle in his eye. But that is not a fault, it is an additional attraction. If he had treated his subject seriously, it would have been painful, maybe repellent. But this is comedy—the play that reflects, ridicules, satirises, chastises with an amiable lash—and underneath it all, contradictory as it may seem, there lurks a rich fund of good nature, a pretty plea in defence of love, the domestic hearth, and a subtle admonition that while accidents will happen in the best regulated families, it is wholesome policy in marriage to give and to take, and (for the rest) to live in hope.

II

Les Deux Écoles is not only an excellent title to a vastly amusing play, its wording should appeal to us in a stricter sense. We over here might do worse than practise a little self-inspection while comparing the two schools of acting, ours and the French. For a better performance, a more eloquent example of the all-round perfection of French acting has not been seen for many a day. I need not pause to praise Mme. Granier, I have outlined her gifts on other occasions, and can but add that she is now even better than in *La Veine*. She is just a few years on the wrong side of the character, but she defies time by her diction and by her complete realisation of the *femme du monde*. She and the inimitable Marie Magnier—artistic kinswoman of Rose Leclercq and Genevieve Ward, and a Parisienne in the bargain—teach us what it means to speak, not only with one's tongue, but with one's intellect at the same time. Every sentence of these artists stands a monument of perfect elocution, every word an entity charged with meaning. And Mme. Lavallière—a model of the *petite femme* who, in being, if not in dress, has ever remained such as Henri Murger painted her in his *Scènes de la vie de Bohême*—follows in the wake of her older colleagues. She has not merely seen a few samples of the ladies with more future than past; she has studied them in their doings, manners, speech—in the thousand and one tricks wherewith they hope to lay a trap for man's weakness. But the soul of the piece, in which there are such consummate comedians and experienced stagers as Guy, Numes, and Perrin, is Brasseur. Brasseur, son of a famous father and a splendid product of heredity, is a play in himself. He is a Protean humorist both by intuition and by study. Whether he faces his audience or turns his back on them, whether he holds forth or remains silent, whether

he prevaricates with childlike blandness or dispenses sound truth with a smile illuminating his earnestness, whether he is the man of the world or acts the rake, he is always himself—and that self is originality. He perambulates the stage, he talks, laughs, argues, not like one who has subordinated himself to another man's words ; he does it all as easily as if the play were an episode of his life, as if the boards were a mere corner of his private domain. He is a great comedian, Brasseur, and to see him surrounded by a crowd who one and all endeavour to maintain harmony of style and tone and manner is a rare delight. *Les Deux Écoles*, play and performance alike, is a masterpiece of humour ; and it raises the hope that Alfred Capus will rejuvenate the glories of comedy, which, in France, as elsewhere were sadly on the wane.

GREAT QUEEN STREET THEATRE: "ALT-HEIDELBERG "

BY WILHELM MEYER-FOERSTER

" Wer nicht liebt Wein, Weib, und Gesang. . . ."

NOVEMBER 23, 1902

I

IF you ask me why this romance has made the conquest of the Fatherland, from the North Sea to the borderline where the Danube touches Slavonic soil, I shall answer, Not because it is a masterpiece, but because it is German to the core. It is German in its atmosphere, its sentiment, its cosiness (*Gemüthlichkeit*), German in its naïvety, its robustious humour, its effusive cordiality; German in the gay clip-clip of the beer jug, in the mild aroma of the grape juice that ripens on the poetic hillocks, sprayed and cooled by the Neckar which Freiligrath immortalised in the most touching chords of his lyre.

Alt-Heidelberg came at a moment when the times were ripe for reaction. As in France, the realistic school had overstrained the bow; and as a series of commercial "slumps" had plunged the country into mourning, it was ready, in its hours of recreation, to greet its *Cyrano*. But the newcomer was not heralded with the trumpets of ante-dated fame. Quite the reverse was the case. It is said that the manager who

produced the play expressed on the eve of the *première* the pious wish "that it might see as many performances as it had had rehearsals." So, except the felicitous title of the famous Alma Mater, there was nothing to prejudice the public in favour of the play, whose author's greatest distinction was the celebrity of his wife as a novelist. Then the Biblical adage asserted itself. The small expectations grew from act to act to abnormal dimensions. The evening was a feast of joy, of sentimental emotions, of vociferous plaudits. Next morning the author was famous, and the play was sought after by every theatre in Germany.

II

Alt-Heidelberg succeeded because it was German, but it also succeeded because, at any rate in its foundations, it is thoroughly human. It is a simple story. A prince, educated in the hide-bound etiquette of a starchy court in a miniature state, is sent under the guardianship of a most benevolent tutor to the university, where the vines and the verses are, as it were, produce of the soil. For the first time he breathes the untainted air of liberty; for the first time he tastes the exuberance of student life, the delights and the boundless vivacity of the cup; for the first time, in the innkeeper's comely daughter, he meets a woman of unmannered naturalness and cordially hospitable lips. Is it a wonder that his youth goes out to her, and that he lives and loves and sows his wild oats *comme on aime à vingt ans*? But the joy is short. The reigning prince dies, and Karl Heinrich is called to dignity and duty. He goes to his realm, but the crown has but thorns for him. The young man of yesterday becomes an austere ruler. His heart is yonder on the banks of the Neckar, where they sing *Gaudeamus igitur* with pearling cups and glowing cheeks. And now he

vegetates in the palace, and courtiers and advisers dog his steps and his every action. Thus the longing for one more dream of freedom besets his days and his nights, and at last he breaks out. He must go back to the boys and the revels, and to Kate, the innkeeper's daughter, whose image lives in his bosom. Alas! circumstances alter cases. The students, duly forewarned of the ducal visit by a pompous valet, leave gaiety behind. There is no true note of rejoicing in his reception; here in Heidelberg, as at Court, there is etiquette rigid and formal. Yet there is one who remains the same—at least inwardly. It is Kate. True, she has promised to marry her *fiancé*, the school-mate of her earliest days, but that is an evasion, not the dictation of her heart. She loves her ruler now as she then loved her boyish prince. But rank and blood forbid further intimacy. Once more they live one hour of their days of happiness, and then it is adieu! She goes heartbroken to the man who will give her his name, and the prince, he wends his way back to the moral fortress, within whose walls his birth compels him to lead a conventional life of splendour and loveless matrimony, an exalted prisoner of State.

III

All this is not great, not deep, not unassailable by criticism. It is merely pictorial, lyrical, something like a pretty ballad by a minor poet. But it has charm. "Youth" is writ large on the whole story and its treatment. For a few hours the songs, the pictures, the love-scenes form a welcome contrast to the stern reality of life. Germans who have not forgotten their mountain land, their national songs, their blissful days of student life and amourettes will be charmed, because it is human to turn over the merry leaves of our life-book's most imaginative volume. English people will

be charmed, because Heidelberg, its castle, its vat, and its verdant hills are closely associated with the young generation which was sent to this summer-city to struggle with the idioms and the tangled grammar of the German language. All the world must be charmed, because all the world has had its day of youth, when the glamour of women, wine, and song obscured the clouds of sorrow and of the struggle of life. Therefore *Alt-Heidelberg* is not a play to be criticised in magisterial fashion. We should treat it as we handle the flowers culled from the roadside in a country walk. There are grander, more odoriferous, more sumptuous flowers in the parks and gardens, but the fresh scent, the simple colouring of the wild blossom has a fascination of its own. It captivates us because we gathered it in happiness in the open, forgetful of the city, its toil and its turmoil.

GERMAN THEATRE: "DAS GROSSE LICHT"

A PLAY IN FOUR ACTS, BY FELIX PHILIPPI

DECEMBER 28, 1902

I

The Great Light, which achieved fame in Germany, is a play in Ibsenite vein without the dark, full blood of Ibsen's knowledge of humanity. It constantly reminds one of *The Master Builder* and his vain struggle against the younger generation. Here, too, the conflict springs from rebellion of the rising against the mature powers of those who have risen. But whereas Ibsen vouchsafes triumph to the young, Philippi destroys the budding genius of the promising painter, whose over-vaulting ambition, stimulated by one moment of fame, makes him jealous of his sponsor and master. On the surface it seems a play with a great problem grandly conceived. There is much action in it ; there are moments of striking theatrical power ; there is a display of rhetoric which sometimes reaches the length and the verbal magnificence of a professorial address. But, on closer examination, when the theatrical is severed from the would-be psychological, there remains but little to move either the mind or the heart. And a play of this nature, a problem-play in a popularised form, is not satisfactory when it merely arouses a superficial curiosity and brings but cold comfort to the soul. If the splendidly conceived, but

inconsistently developed, character of the older master had really been that of a great man—if he had been great not only in his work, but great in his attitude towards his rebellious, demented pupil, there would have been food for valuable discussion. We should have gone home in an agitated frame of mind; we should have pitted opinion against opinion to arrive at the truth as to who deserved to conquer—the younger generation or the old. We should have seen something more than a mere interesting play. But the older master is not great. He has no sympathy with the wild dreams of adolescence. He is relentless towards the *protégé* whom he has lifted by his will and his power, whom he could have retained, had he managed him with tact and kindness, yet whom he disowns, irritates, and, when his own vanity is wounded, flagellates. When it is too late, and the boy's immature mind is unhinged, then the great man is once more the guide, philosopher, and friend. But that is mere reaction. A truly great character bears and forbears, is proof against either attack or ingratitude, and scorns the policy of being pleased with the world so long as it bows and cringes.

Nor does Philippi profess to worry us with problems and careful characterisation. He is from top to toe *homme de théâtre*. All is grist that comes to his mill. A sensational newspaper story, a debate in Parliament—which is, I believe, the foundation of this play—a *question brulante* he knows how to turn by swift sleight of hand into a play. He has even woven a good play around the Dreyfus case. He does not care about depth or style. He writes with an ever-flowing stylographic pen, sometimes finely, sometimes crudely, sometimes in profusion, but always effectively—in short, as a craftsman, Philippi is a model of dexterity. With the exception of Pinero, every British dramatist can learn from him how to master and to utilise all the secrets of the stage. Dramatic structure is his innate

gift; that is why he is successful and voted clever. And if his depth were only equal to his power of observation, of assimilation and reproduction, he would be a master of the art instead of a master of the craft.

II

There is something more to learn from the performance of *Das Grosse Licht*, and that is stage-management. Some enthusiastic English admirer of Max Behrend has called him one of the first stage-managers in Europe. That was bold praise indeed, but, after seeing the *Grosse Licht* I think that it did not drift so very far into exaggeration. The stage-management of the play was a work of art in itself. The meeting of the town council in the first act, with its finely differentiated types of men, its unceasing bustle of life and talk; the artistically disordered room of the quaint organist in the third act; the quiet impressiveness of the Cathedral cupola in the last, which combined loftiness of aspect with solemnity of situation—were something to be remembered. It should be seen and studied by all who have to do with stage productions. And Behrend the actor was as good as his *alter ego* the stage-manager. In twelve months Behrend has made great strides. His sense of humour has developed, his intensity has become mellowed. He was both pathetic and amusing as the organist, the idoliser of Bach, a crotchety grumbler with a heart of gold. Next to Behrend shone Friedrich Taeger. What force, what virility, what splendour of diction! He made the man great even in his small moments. He ruled his stage and his audience. Happy Hamburg that will have such an Othello, such a Torquato Tasso—such an artist! Nor did the young generation belie its aspirations. Already Ziegler has ingratiated himself with the public as the Prince in *Alt-Heidelberg*. Now he has gone

further, he has given us the tragedy of juvenile dreams of glory, with a passion, a colour, an impetus almost bordering on delirium. Perhaps in his ardour he swept beyond the limits of possibility, but what a joy it was to see a man so wholly absorbed in his work ; what a lesson to young actors, would they but go and see him.

And now let me speak about Margaret Halstan, the English actress who plays in German to fill her leisure hours. It is no easy task to curb the English tongue to the German consonants ; it is no easy task, forsooth, for an English actress accustomed to rehearse twenty odd times over a single play, to create something new with but six rehearsals. Yet Margaret Halstan, by sheer volition, nearly overpowers her origin and her habits. In the prominent part of *Das Grosse Licht* she has much to say, yet more to convey by silence. Her speech is as winsome as her presence, and at moments she touches the chord that vibrates ; but above what she says in words I place her eloquent silence. She is never unoccupied, she acts with the play as the onlooker acts with the play of life. She is not conscious of it, yet she does it all the time. And to do that upon the stage, without obtrusion, is to understand the finest nuance of a fine art.

ACTORS AND ACTING,
AND MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS

LA PETITE COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE

FEBRUARY 16, 1902

I

IN a sanguine moment I once mooted the possibility of producing some French plays in London without engaging a permanent company. I contended, you will see anon with what result, that among the millions in our midst there would be a sufficient number of French actors and French-speaking English actors without the flaw of an accent, to establish on a modest scale a French theatre in miniature. The idea is neither so young nor so rash as it seems at the first glance. Some of my readers will remember that about eight years ago I produced at the late Opera Comique François Coupée's drama, *Le Pater*, with a Swedish artist, Miss Anna Zetterberg, in the main part. Turning to my Press cuttings, I find that the experiment, daring as it was pronounced to be, succeeded beyond expectations. The critics in those days were none too indulgent towards the Independent Theatre, but on this occasion our antagonists waved the olive branch, and among those who were rewarded with unstinted praise were the well-known names of Herman de Lange, Ivan Watson, and Paul Berton. Why the experiment was so short-lived I do not precisely remember; in the midst of that "independent" struggle there was not much room for "happy thoughts"—for they are children of sunshine, and at that period my sky

was clouded with hostile arrows. Since then the idea of a French Theatre has frequently bobbed up in some form or other, but somehow it could not materialise because the establishment of foreign theatres in London is fraught with great risk, and the capital question of a substantial guarantee could not be solved. Yet there always remain two factors in favour of the plan : firstly, the great interest of many English folk in the French language and French drama ; secondly, the possibility of recruiting in London a company of artists, both French and English, who would most gladly lend their talent to a *Petite Comédie Française*.

II

One day, soon after the production of *The Gay Lord Quex*, I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Fortescue, and as the general conversation turned around French plays and acting, I found an opportunity to recall the splendid French pronunciation of the Duchess of Strood. Miss Fortescue then proceeded to discuss our subject in French, and I elicited from her that she would gladly appear in one of the most interesting plays of Octave Feuillet—I think it was *Le Sphinx*. From that moment onward I borrowed Diogenes' lantern in quest of Franco-English artists. And as in connection with our Sunday Special matinées I saw many actors and actresses, I soon arrived at the conclusion that the "deep-level" was much richer than could have been expected. There were besides Messrs. Paul Berton, de Lange, and Ivan Watson, already named, Miss Marie Tempest and her husband, Mr. Cosmo Stuart, whose French is *tout ce qu'il y a de plus Parisien*, Mr. R. C. Herz, Mr. Lewis Hillier, Madame Ludovici, the gifted reciter, Miss Agnes Delaporte, Miss Beatrice Irwin, Miss Amy Bettely, Miss Marian Caldwell, Miss Eva Grand, Miss Nina Williams, to name a few, among whom the ladies were in over-

whelming majority. That settled the question as to one cardinal point. The material was there even before my little note produced a score or more of promising replies.

III

So far so good. We have the army—how are we going to manœuvre with it? Is there to be flourish of trumpets, castles in the air of a permanent company in a regular theatre? Is there to be a clamour for Mæcenas and a *fata morgana* of great promises? Certainly not, if I may be allowed a word in the matter. A Petite Comédie Française must not be like the frog in the fable, nor imitate the mythological Mr. Icarus. It is of no avail to dash off like a rocket and to descend like a stick. For, in the first place, there is the experience to guide us that even a permanent French Theatre can but eke out a poor existence in our vast metropolis. And, next, it is most necessary, before organising La Petite Comédie Française on the basis of, say, the Stage Society, to try our strength by a single performance. We need not fear that the stage management will be a weak point with such experienced hands as Mr. de Lange and Mr. Berton; but what must be demonstrated above all by a *ballon d'essai* production is in how far an *ensemble* can be brought together in which every kind of part (*emploi*) is filled by the right person. My suggestion, therefore, is, let us court for a single matinée the hospitality of one of our managers and lead off with a fairly easy, cheerful play, say of Labiche, whose great stage-craft fights half the actors' battle. If we succeed in producing *Le Voyage de M. Perrichon*, for instance, to the satisfaction of our guests and of those who are willing to pay for their seats in order to lay no undue tax on one single pocket, a larger stride may be attempted. The next venture might be an early Sardou, *La Souris* of Pailleron, a Dumas *fils*,

perhaps a play of the modern conversational dramatists, such as Donnay and Capus. But the plays must be cheerful, interesting and clean. Our *Petite Comédie* would have but one mission, to amuse all and to instruct those to whom a good production in French is a study and a pleasure. I may be sanguine (thank the Muses I have not exhausted my enthusiasm in spite of many discouraging experiences) but I cherish the belief that if the first performance succeeds there are quite enough Francophiles in London to maintain a little club which will gather six or seven times a year to hear a good French play by artists who will look upon their efforts as a labour of love.

At any rate, I appeal to my readers for their opinion, their criticism, their support, while as far as actors are concerned, their "Still they come" will be heartily welcomed. For a *Petite Comédie Française* in London will harm no one, and perhaps add a few atoms to the gaiety of our city.

TWO FRENCH ACTRESSES :

RÉJANE

I

"How will it affect me now?" I pondered, as I took my seat close to the stage in the front row, a mere yard away from the world of canvas, tinsel, and rouge. Here was a severe test of my imagination and of the actress's power; for I know the play of *Zaza* so well that the whole *scenario* dwells in my memory, and Réjane I have seen so often in all her great parts that it would seem as if her art had nothing new to say to me. After all, most great actors have one foe in common, and that is the repetition of their own personality, the reiteration of movements, intonations, flights of passion, marking as it were the boundary line of their domain.

And thus listening from my own choice to familiar words uttered by an artist whom I had heard speak them several times before, I was prepared to experience no new sensation. If I had found the performance somewhat trite I should not have been disappointed, nor would I have blamed the actress. Familiarity is a safe antidote to highly strung expectations.

But Réjane as an artist reminds me of the Frenchwoman who gave an explanation of her perennial domestic felicity. She had married a man of a wayward, reckless character, a man as fickle as the mood

of a theatrical audience. Yet she held him tight, was to him the one woman in the world, and all she could offer as an argument was that "she strove every day to make a fresh conquest of his love."

In Réjane there is no question of constant change to end in invariable sameness. Réjane is unaccountable. She will play a part a hundred times, and a hundred times she will change the key, change the effect, the stress on words, the manner of gesture. She is never her own under-study; she scorns the tradition of her own conception. A restless worker spurred by genius, she is ever in search of new light upon the same subject, of countries unexplored. If I read her mental composition aright, her doctrine is that in histrionic work the last word is never spoken. The possibilities of characterisation are as infinite as the depth of nature in every mortal individual.

II

The merits, positive or negative, of the play shall remain undiscussed now. The game is scarcely worth the candle, for while I should have much to say in defence of it, and confine fault-finding to the third act (at Dufresne's) and the last, others in this country will not hear of anything but wholesale condemnation. It is less a question of art than of racial ethics. Women of the Zaza type are even on the stage and in books repugnant to our public. One does not talk about them in polite society. So it is no use reviving the old controversy. The actress, not the play, is the thing of interest.

When Réjane created Zaza several years ago, it was generally voted an achievement of magnificence. All that the art of acting could accomplish to materialise the character was there. It was a performance worthy of a virtuoso. But to-day Réjane's Zaza is something more than magnificent. I observed closely and I drew comparisons, and somehow in this interesting occupa-

tion I felt more fascinated than ever before. In many respects the outward aspect of the performance remains unchanged. Réjane still goes through her minute disrobing and *maquillage* in the first act; she still toys with the artificial locks which are essential to the get-up of the Café Chanteuse; she still works with her handkerchief, and blows and wipes her nose as one would scarcely condone it in any one but her; she still differentiates *la femme* and *la fille*, now feliney refined, then frankly coarse. But as the love drama deepens, from the moment she meets Dufresne, she pays less attention to the details of the stage business and penetrates the human side of the part. I do not quite know how to convey it in so many words to those who have not seen the play, but I felt all the time that Réjane was striving to redeem the staginess of the character and to bring out that pathos which exists in spite of superficial perversity. To me her Zaza is no longer the flaring, vulgar *cocotte* of the *beuglant* (music-hall of doubtful morals): she has graduated one step on the moral ladder and has approached the *grisette*—the creature of no morals and a great heart. In this Zaza there is no longer lewdness undiluted; the voice of love—a childish, reckless, irresponsible love makes itself heard. In the fourth act, just before that terrible cataclysm of words which makes the woman a tigress and the man a cur, there is a moment of amorous abandon so tender, so unobtrusively pathetic, so overwhelmingly eloquent in its paucity of words and its effusiveness by glance and gesture, that one must be made of strong metal not to echo the throb of the situation. Réjane's Zaza is one of those achievements which can only be judged from a lofty standpoint. It may court the hypercriticism of the puny fault-finder (what work of art does not?), but criticism which does, as it should, see steadily and whole, will sum it up in the assertion that for the nonce it vindicates Victor Hugo's famous words, "Le laid c'est le beau."

JANE HADING IN "FROU-FROU"

I

IF you want to know what the modern school of play-writing has done for the drama, and, for the matter of that, for the education of the thinking playgoer, I recommend a visit to *Frou-Frou*. I feel sanguine that you will exclaim, as I did when I witnessed the tragic end of the heroine, "The old game is up!" We rebel against falsetto nowadays—we want something which, if it cannot be truth and nature itself, is akin to both. We do not believe that the quarrel between Frou-Frou and her lovable sister, Louise, was warranted; we do not believe that the forsaken husband would bring back, in person, her fortune to his feather-brained, faithless, fugitive wife. And forsooth! who can now greet the death scene (that *salto mortale* on a bare-back sofa) with anything but a shrug of the shoulders and a yawn of weariness? Dying people, be they Magdalens or not, are not "hustled" in the real world; at worst they are sent by ambulance to the hospital; but even the cruellest of the cruel would not drive a Frou-Frou to her husband's house, there to kneel for her sins and to breathe her last in agonised explanations.

I do not say this to damage *Frou-Frou*. Considering the method of play-writing in vogue when it was produced, it is an excellent specimen of its class. It is as skilful in workmanship as imitation Delft ware, and

the first act will always stand out as an exposition of singular vividness, with excellent side-lights on the marriage market in France. But, on the other hand, the temptation was too great not to attempt to demonstrate, by the aid of this thirty-year-old play, how different we have grown in taste, and how completely the manner of the stage has changed with the advent of the younger generation. *Frou-Frou* is still in parts a play of great interest, and some of its scenes offer opportunities seldom rivalled of testing an actress's force ; it also contains fragments of dialogue, and one character (Brigard, Frou-Frou's father) which retain all their old excellence. But the sentimental basis of the story is no longer of our time, and unless we are ever ready to be moved by the woes of doves, soiled and with their wings clipped, we feel more inclined to smile than to wipe away a tear.

II

Frou-Frou is the best in the long list of Mlle. Hading's creations. I say this deliberately, and in spite of my recollections of the best of all Frou-Frous—Sarah Bernhardt. But Jane Hading's conception is quite different from her sister's, and if it were not for certain vocal *Sarahbesques* which sometimes impair the originality of Mlle. Hading's diction, there would be no parallel at all between the two creations. The keynote of the latest Frou-Frou is moderation and restraint in the earlier scenes, in order to let the great outbreak at the end of the third act (the quarrel with Louise) tower as a climax. Therefore this Frou-Frou is in the first act not quite that kind of ante-dated Nora—that giddy irresponsible young thing—which is held in such favour by our actresses. Jane Hading treats the character from the first with some semblance of earnestness. She represents a woman of the world—elegant to such

a fault that she knows neither the value of money nor the grave importance of the marriage question. She is a drifter, like Pinero's Iris, and she does not reveal any sign of strength until she realises—at the wrong moment, like all beings of a choleric temperament—that she is supplanted in her home and her husband's affections. Then there is an eruption of volcanic proportions, and Jane Hading, unsparing to herself and to her surroundings, flings, howls, hurls the words at her sister's head, with deathly pallor in her countenance, and her auburn locks curling like flames around her shoulders. She is great in that moment. She gives her best, her all—so much, indeed, that there remains little force to lavish on the fourth act, which she again takes with sober intonations and measured gestures. In the death scene Mlle. Hading makes a fine effort to break the unwarranted duration of the agony by introducing short pauses, as if to gather breath, and uttering the words in spasmodic jerks. The effect is singular, and tends to redeem the impossible act, but nothing can render it truly pathetic; the only thing that may stir one's feelings is the sad picture of youth and beauty battling against death.

There is no denying that Mlle. Hading has made mighty strides since, in 1883, her star began to shine in Ohnet's *Ironmaster*. She has still to fight against the tradition of earlier times which classed her among skilful but unemotional actresses; and in England, more than elsewhere, there yet seems a certain lingering disinclination to admit her superiority. But that will pass. When Jane Hading has been seen in *Le Maître des Forges*, in *L'Etrangère*, *Les Demi-Vierges*, in *Frou-Frou*, it will be recognised that, by right of conquest, she belongs to the select few.

JANE HADING

JUNE 1, 1902

I

TIME, that enemy of all mankind, and of women in particular, has been wonderfully kind to Jane Hading. It has done for her what russet does in early autumn for the foliage ; it has deepened her beauty and mellowed all that was characteristic in her. She is now, as she ever was, a picture upon which the eye will feast and dwell with never-tiring delectation, for her every movement is grace itself, and her every pose challenges the sculptor's chisel. But even more beautiful than the fascinating line of form is the expressiveness of her wondrous eyes—eyes that vie with the human voice in speaking volumes of sensation ; eyes that shed at will tenderness and passion, ire and contempt ; eyes to solace with infinite pity and to wither with relentless scorn. In days gone by that charm constituted her main, I would even say her sole, claim to histrionic superiority. Besides, she knew her *métier* to the full. The craft of the stage had no secrets for her, and use it she did with such consummate skill that one was wont to contemplate it as one beholds the laborious pictures of a time-honoured mediocre school. A cold admiration for so much pain and study did but intensify one's regret for an utter absence of soul. In other words, in her early days Jane Hading hardly ever conquered by her emotional gifts. Her performances

seemed automatic ; her pathos sounded like something exquisitely urbane and correct, but it never quickened the pulse of her hearers ; all she did was equally refined and equally studied. Hers was an academic talent nursed and fostered in the etiquette-bound atmosphere of the salon, unconscious of the fresh air without in the life we live, unfettered by conventionalities and decorum.

This inability to communicate to others what she was supposed to feel, this want of magnetism, delayed time after time Jane Hading's conquest of the summit. She played splendidly—in the literal sense of the word—in *The Ironmaster*, in *Frou-Frou*, in *l'Aventurière*, in all the bravura parts of the Second Empire. But like many other splendours her success was evanescent. She had reached a certain level and there she remained ; always a distinguished, fascinating actress, but never great.

II

Then time came to the rescue of experience. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the voice of the artist, hitherto relying on the co-operation of her eloquent eyes, changed its timbre. A tear crept in, and conviction followed in its wake. And as the voice grew more flexible, it became a more forcible interpreter of the agitation of her inner being ; the whole method of Jane Hading underwent a change. She is still statuesque, perhaps too much so at times ; she still remains conscious of the domination of her eyes ; but no longer is she so entirely swayed by the technique of her craft that it leaves no room for intuition. I confess that other actresses, French, English or German, manifest greater power in the captivation of my personal feelings. Jane Hading, seemingly weeping herself, is not yet the mistress of my emotions. But the more I see of her, after a lapse of five years

since the creation of *Les Demi-Vierges*, the more keenly I note the gradual change from the icy to that festival atmosphere where sympathetic feelings reach the borderland of heartfelt sensibility. Jane Hading, in fine, is nearing greatness, and if she continues to act as she did the other day in the thrilling (if repellent) scene of the second act, and again in the last act of *Les Demi-Vierges*, she will rank with Sarah Bernhardt.

To confess all this after a renewed acquaintance with a play of a most unsympathetic nature is to explain how great must be the progress of Jane Hading. For the play itself, a faint contraction of the famous book, is one that sickens, in spite of its cleverness. I am amazed that it has been produced in London, and yet more amazed that the Censor passed it, and that a somewhat hypocritical variegation of title (*Maud*), and of the word *demi-vierge* into *demi-vertu*, was deemed a concession to our insular sensitiveness. There is no necessity for bringing before the footlights the deplorable malady of sexual perversity. Most people will fail to understand what it all means, and those who do will regret the extension of their knowledge. I am the last to deny that the stage should not as closely and as artistically as possible be a mirror of life; but there are phases of life which had best remain hidden from view, and there are things whose existence remains best buried in the depth of human shame. Plays like *Les Demi-Vierges* are dangerous because they are what one of the characters appositely calls *denaïseurs de profession*—wilful disenchanters. They engender reflections which should be unthought, they demonstrate nothing, they cure nothing. But what they do achieve is to destroy the few shreds of idealism which still cling to the conception of human nature in a generation singularly *blusé*. And it is but a scant consolation that great acting such as Jane Hading's provokes pity for the sorry heroine instead of profound aversion.

ST. GEORGE'S HALL : CHARLOTTE WIEHE'S RETURN

JUNE 22, 1902

I

THEATRE des Capucines from Paris at St. George's Hall. It sounds very well, but it is the tone that makes the music, and I am afraid that London will not take very kindly to the idea of paying 100 per cent. premium for a Parisian performance of snippets, albeit that Madame Wiehe is its lode-star. For one thing the *entr'actes* are longer than the plays, and it was not until 11.30 P.M. that the curtain rose on the most important item, Bereny's now famous pantomime *La Main*. And then we are really no longer such connoisseurs of art in our teens that a footling duologue like *Le Phoque*, acted in the most commonplace manner of French curtain-raiser-despatch, or an indifferent little one-act opera comique, of time-honoured humour and fifth-rate composition, can afford us any satisfaction. Ever courteous towards guests, and ever ready to harbour a pleasant little prejudice in favour of foreigners, the public took these inanities placidly, in an imperturbable spirit of good humour. Home-made goods would not have passed so easily, but then there was no ordinary first-night Areopagus in session. The balcony was "nationalist," and the stalls were fashionable, hence there was a modest "hand" for the actors, who worked very hard, and two of whom, Mdlle. Alice

Bonheur, a truly delightful soubrette, and M. Max-Dearly, a character-actor of some distinction, whipped the feeble little plays into some little life.

But from a purely dramatic point of view the evening was barren to a degree, for the playlet *Colombine*, by M. Eric Khorn (of Copenhagen?) and translated by Jean Thorel, is not of much concern, not even as a vehicle for a star to make a triumphant entry. In this play we have a very unsavoury story of Bohemianism and gilded poverty, in which the wife offers herself to a despised highest bidder and drives her husband into suicide, although the completion of the bargain was deferred to the morrow. Yet, as it stands, the affair is distinctly unpleasant, and belongs to what the French call *comédie rosse*. The Censor, like Mr. Goldfinch in Grundy's famous adaptation, must read his manuscripts through two pairs of spectacles. When he wears the one, he condemns the direct and tragic manipulation of a moral question (as in *Monna Vanna*), but with the other he finds "innuendo"—nowhere. And so it comes to pass that *Monna Vanna* is voted unsuited to our susceptibilities, while the truly unclean offering and bidding of *Colombine* and the Baron obtains the official licence. "Doux pays!" as Forain would say.

II

Two years ago, when Madame Wiehe came over here, she was fairly unknown, and her fine work as a pantomimist promised splendid development. Then she went to Paris, where the piquant little woman attracted much attention, and her gentle art of mimicry created a furore of a kind. Unfortunately, the ogre "publicity" laid hold on her, and she was persuaded to extend her knowledge of French and to act in that language, which is as divinely beautiful and as slyly treacherous as a syren. Whoever advised Madame

Wiehe that she was now ripe to act in French rendered her a bad service. I daresay that a band of gourmets, such as abound in Paris, would applaud her mobile play of gesture and her quaint pronunciation of the language. But that is but ephemeral glory; it leads to naught. In one respect the great French public (and their best critics) are implacable. A foreign accent—be it a mere breath—is an unpardonable sin. Even the best Belgian French is pooh-poohed; ask Mdlle. Adeline Dudlay, of the Français. And as for English actors and actresses who have tried, and tried in vain, to establish a footing on the French stage, I had better leave them unnamed.

Now, Madame Wiehe has not only an accent in her French, which is superficially correct, but it is the worst accent of all—it is Teutonic, the accent that chants and drawls out, the accent that in one single intonation spoils the whole of a dramatic effect. But that is not all. As a French actress Madame Wiehe displays a most singular incongruity. Her gestures, lively, exuberant, sometimes Bernhardt-like, are in flagrant contradiction to her diction. In movement Madame Wiehe is undoubtedly Parisienne, but her parlance is essentially foreign. It seems as if the gestures gallop ahead, and the words follow in an awkward trot. And the *ensemble* is a curious mixture of good acting and bad, whilst it is very difficult to judge whether, in spite of evidence of much experience, Madame Wiehe is really an actress of more than ordinary gifts.

Quite another story is her manifestation as a pantomimist. In this art she has, to my mind, but one rival, Felicia Mallet, but even that does not discount her position. For in pantomime Charlotte Wiehe is wholly original. With her countenance she can express all the human emotions; she commands tragedy as well as comedy, and her every movement seems to intensify her facial play with singular emphasis. It is, perhaps,

this very gift of extraordinary expressiveness of gesture which stands in her way as an actress. For if acting lays stress on enunciation above all, pantomime demands agility of movement and play of the features, and to blend the two is a problem of rare difficulty. So it is as a pantomimist that Charlotte Wiehe maintains her reputation, for her performance in *La Main* is worth all the rest of the programme—and a good deal more.

SARAH BERNHARDT

JUNE 21, 1902

LEAVING Shakespeare out of the question, this is the second time that the great French actress has brought an English play to England. The first was Mr. F. C. Phillips's *As in a Looking Glass*, which came back to us damaged by translation and the Parisian critics. The other is Mr. Marion Crawford's *Francesca da Rimini*, which in its French polish by the skilled hand of Mr. Marcel Schwob, already well known as the reverential translator of *Hamlet*, forms reading of a peculiar distinction. Indeed, I think that Mr. Marcel Schwob has not received half the attention he deserves, for if the play at moments rises above the low level of melodrama, it is solely due to the exquisite French into which the translator has turned phrases which conceal but shallow ideas. The language has, in spite of its modern form, a touch of mediæval stateliness. At a first glance it would seem almost stilted, not to say clumsy; but the further one reads, the clearer becomes Mr. Schwob's intention. He has achieved the feat of wedding the mould of a bygone age to the vocabulary of to-day.

Unfortunately the *timbre* of a language is but a superficial cloak. It cannot conceal the coarse structure of the skeleton underneath. For the play itself is not only modern in its conception, but in its execution; it is a somewhat commonplace mixture of melodrama

and the *drame d'adultère* which flourished on the French stage between 1880 and 1890 in a form which is now considered obsolete.

In his desire to be true to history, yet, as the author says in his preface, to be obedient to "considerations purely dramatic," Mr. Crawford has become an iconoclast. He has played havoc with our illusions. The Francesca haloed by Dante's verse as a sinner in innocence has degenerated into an ordinary adulteress, and Paolo, irresistibly drawn by fate, passion, and the affinity of youth towards his brother's wife, is in this play but a co-respondent in fancy dress, and not a very prudent one either. The guilty couple—there is no reason to soften the term, since there is no excuse for their treachery—trail their lust across the action in monotonous fervour and childish thoughtlessness. In this respect the play is almost naïve, for if Giovanni Malatesta had but opened eyes and ears, he could have dispensed with the painful expedient of cross-examining his own child to arrive at the truth. The whole castle literally echoed vows of illicit love, but Giovanni heard nothing, saw nothing, because otherwise there would have been no need for five acts.

And so we are wearied by endless love-duets, here and there enlivened by a strong scene, not always apposite, yet always effective; and it is truly a relief when the fury of the sorely-tried husband makes short work of the unpoetic business. In the last act, indeed, occurs the one fine, tragic scene of the play. When Giovanni, in spite of the discovery, still professes his boundless love for his guilty wife, when he almost stoops to compromise if only she will be his, and she deluges him with vials of wrath and contempt for his disfavoured body, the thrill of tragedy is sprung upon us. The cripple stands there an image of infinite sorrow and infinite sympathy. It is a horrible scene, of almost repellent brutality, but it is dramatic to a degree, for it is charged with

the agony of two beings in the fatal crisis of their lives.

It is hardly necessary to explain how Sarah Bernhardt plays the part of Francesca. Take the essence of her Marguerite Gauthier, her Frou-Frou, her later creations, such as Fedora, Theodora, La Tosca, all the great *amoureuses* which she has acted for decades in perennial youth and intransient beauty of figure and countenance; imagine her fascinating personality arrayed in the undulating robes of a period when even the needle of the seamstress idealised the female form divine, and you can imagine her Francesca. She reveals nothing new, she is modern in defiance of scenery and costume; she does not endow the character with specific individuality, but seems to compose it out of fragments from her *repertoire*; but the charm is unimpaired, and the music of her voice chants love and languor as sweetly as it chanted before; while the staccato, the capriccioso, and the fortissimo have lost nothing of their imposing vehemence. Personally, much as I admire Sarah Bernhardt, I must own that these vocal inflections which, book in hand, I can forecast with mathematical preciseness, have ceased to electrify me. I admit that the art is consummate, that the diction is perfection, that as an actress of overwhelming explosive power Sarah Bernhardt is still unrivalled; but, somehow, I seek in vain for spontaneity. Her performance is magnificent, but it is a performance. It courts admiration, it exercises at moments a hypnotic influence, it fascinates, it excites, it irritates; yet the heart does not beat louder, and the consciousness that this is art, not nature, never falters. But a performance that stirred real emotion was that of M. de Max, the young Roumanian, who played Giovanni. He was ugly to the degree of loathsomeness. From head to foot the body was all awry, and one wondered how a shapely man could maintain during three long hours such distortion. However,

the ugliness vanished when he spoke, when the words seemed to pour forth, not merely from his lips, but from his soul. The tragic note was struck, and coming events cast their shadows in the ominous utterance of the actor.

SIR CHARLES WYNDHAM

JUNE 29, 1902

I

THE dignity conferred upon the foremost comedian of the English stage has been the means of solving a knotty question. It was ludicrous to read about the various speculations rife in theatrical circles. At least three managers were to be knighted. Three! Why only three? What about So-and-So? And how as to the claims of X? And what has Y not done for the legitimate drama and Z for musical comedy? So the comments ran, here and there fortified by a "we hear from a trustworthy source"; whereas common sense quietly whispered: "Why should men who exploit theatres for their own profit and pleasure receive an official reward for their successful commerce?" And somewhat louder: "If, however, it be the intention to include the drama in the list of honours in order to pay homage to a profession which contributes much to the useful entertainment of the nation, then let *one* man be chosen who by general suffrage stands on the same plane as the acknowledged chief, Sir Henry Irving."

Luckily, common sense has prevailed among his Majesty's advisers, and the dramatic profession has been honoured in the person of Sir Charles Wyndham.

II

The position of Sir Charles Wyndham is indeed unique. For twenty years he has held his own in a branch of his art which is perhaps the most difficult of all, and neither time nor newcomers have been able to displace him. Now, as in the eighties of the last century, he shines by the refinement of his style, the subtlety of his sense of humour, the distinction, the effective *verve*, of his diction. He is, on the stage and in life, the incarnation of what all the world has accepted as a model—a perfect gentleman. Moreover, he possesses in a marked degree the faculty of versatility. Remember him as a Cabinet Minister, as a doctor, as a lawyer, as David Garrick, as a phlegmatic gentleman of independent means (*Still Waters*), he is always the same, yet always different. The sameness is his birthright, which ordains that good breeding knows but one level; the difference is the outcome of his keen observation of the peculiarities, the manners, and the speech of different social strata. But Sir Charles Wyndham is not merely a great conversationalist; he commands also some powers of pathos and passion. But his method is more gentle than vehement, more persuasive than ebullient. That is why his cavalier in the would-be tragedy *The Jest* was lacking in conviction, his Cyrano—in the tragic scenes—intensity; but that is also why his cross-examination in *Mrs. Dane's Defence* is equal to the adroitest, the most thrilling inquisitions conducted by lawyers of undisputed eminence.

And this brings me to another part of Sir Charles' life-work, his activity as a manager. In former days his censors often used to say, "Wyndham thrives on adaptations from the French and revivals," and to a certain extent the reproach was not unjustified. But in the last few years he has displayed much zeal in affording

English dramatists a hearing, and one of them, Mr. H. A. Jones, has scored no less than four successes under his management. I refer to *The Bauble Shop*, *The Physician*, *The Liars*, and *Mrs. Dane's Defence*; while anon a new comedy by Mr. Jones will open Wyndham's Theatre for the winter, and yet another will inaugurate his third theatre in St. Martin's Lane. Mr. L. N. Parker, too, owes his one great success to Sir Charles Wyndham. *Rosemary* would never have fared so well in other hands; three acts were delightful, as fragrant as the title, but the last act, a mere monologue-study in senility, required an actor of genius to escape derision. Again, Mr. Parker, this time in the character of a poet and a writer of tragedies, saw his *Fest* on the Criterion boards. This experiment was scarcely fortunate, yet it merits recognition as an effort, while much the same applies to the production of plays by Mr. Isaac Henderson and Mr. Dudley Morgan.

Sir Charles has, therefore, deserved well of the national drama, and his revivals of *David Garrick*, of *Still Waters Run Deep*, however frequently they may recur, are always welcome because they commemorate the names of two prominent playwrights of yesterday, Robertson and Tom Taylor.

So much for the record of the new knight, which I have rapidly surveyed on the spur of the moment which brought the pleasant tidings. May he continue to flourish, a master of his art, a veteran in his profession, yet a juvenile in power, in spirit, and in fertility. And may a unanimous chorus of congratulation betoken that the King's pleasure is the people's joy.

THE CENTENARY OF A GIANT

I

AN anecdote told by Edmond About, on the day when Alexandre Dumas *père's* statue was unveiled in Paris in 1883, depicts the giant as by snapshot.

They had met at the station of Marseilles. Dumas, as fervent, buoyant, impulsive as ever, had dragged the traveller to his hotel; from hotel to *bouillabaisse* on the Cannebiere; from the Cannebiere to the theatre, where a new piece of his was received with raptures and wreaths of tinselled laurels; from the theatre to the streets, where Dumas, in the joy of his glory, harangued the crowd; from the streets to supper; from supper, when the clock chimed four, to hotel and bed. By that time About had become a mere automaton, his spirit was still struggling against sleep, but the flesh had given way. But Dumas was wide awake. "Sorry for you, *old* man"—with the accent on *old*—"but I must do a little job before turning in." "Little job?" stuttered the other sleepily. "Yes; three leaders and—the deuce! there's the plot of a little one-act play that buzzes in my brain. I'll try to pull that off."

Next morning, when About awoke, he found Dumas busy with the brush and razor; on the table lay three large pink envelopes and a neat little pile of manuscript fastened with a piece of silk tape.

While the cocks were crowing, the giant had written his three leaders and that little gem of a curtain-raiser, *L'Invitation à la Valse*.

Was it to be wondered at, after evidence of such prolificness, that Dumas, accused of doing but part of his work himself, while "ghosts" were said to achieve the main task, vehemently defended himself in his famous letter to Beranger? He says there, among other pointed things, "Do you believe it possible, dear Master, that if any one else but I had written such books as 'The Three Musketeers,' 'Twenty Years After,' and 'Monte Cristo,' he would leave all the honour and the profit to me without a murmur?" And, as a matter of fact, none of the avowed collaborators of Dumas have equalled him in fame. Most of them are dead, all of them (with the exception of Auguste Maquet, perhaps) forgotten. But the Master—now a hundred years old—lives in his work, and his books are still a stimulator of youth and a comfort in old age. For to read Dumas *père* is to evict the worries of life and to wing one's imagination for a flight into that realm of fantasy where the sun never sets and youth is perennial.

One more anecdote to complete the miniature of a colossal character. Dumas *père*, epicurean to a fault, treating money with the contempt of genius, was ever in straits, yet he always found the wherewithal to furnish his lavish table, to clothe and befeather the queens of his capacious heart, to help a friend in need. But once—shortly before 1853, when he fled Paris pursued by process-servers and bailiffs—he was truly at the end of his tether. There was literally not a centime in the house. At that evil hour a friend called on Dumas, and with hot tears of Gallic emotion he wept a tale of woe. It all amounted to 200 francs or the debtors' goal. Dumas, big baby as he was in spite of his innate turbulence, shed tears too; but as they dropped he recovered his usual gaiety, and said,

"Those pearls won't fetch anything at uncle's. *Que faire?*" Suddenly he exclaimed, "I've got it. Have you twenty minutes' time, and can you hold your tongue?" The other nodded. "Well, then, sit down on this sofa; in half an hour the money is yours." For twenty minutes no sound was heard but the splutter of the pen and the flutter of leaves.

Then the author said, "*Voilà!* Take this to the office of the *National*. The cashier will pay 200 francs on my account."

His heart was as bountiful as his head.

II

The marvellous vitality of the man accounts to a certain extent for the vitality of his work. His was *mens sana in corpore sano* with a vengeance. Like boys who climb cliffs and trees regardless of peril, he tackled all subjects with equal intrepidity. His first play was the tragedy of *Christine, Queen of Sweden*, and, being promptly refused by the Comédie Française, it was left mouldering for seven years. Meanwhile, fearless of all historians, Academicians, and all the critics in ambush, he decided to wage war against the pseudo-classic style of the day, and invaded the history of France. *Henry III. and his Court* was the first battle-royal of the Romantic School, and it won with flying colours. In design, in colour, in luxuriousness of speech and fancy, it fulfilled the heart's desire of the new romanticists. Henceforth Dumas was hailed as the brother-in-arms of Victor Hugo, and, more popular than Hugo by the geniality of his warm-blooded personality, he became the representative man of the period. He incarnated France of the first half of the nineteenth century, his son, in his wake, incarnated the third quarter.

With *Henry III.* the vogue began. All the world was

laid under contribution—Rome, Greece, England, the United Republic of the Netherlands—every history was his field ; and if here and there his plough dug strange furrows in foreign ground, from a dramatic point of view his plays hardly ever failed to pass muster. For, like Schiller, who described Italy without ever having set foot on the classic soil, Dumas had the faculty of complementing by imagination what partial knowledge left uncertain.

Yet, in this overflow of creative power he kept his eye steadily on the public barometer. He knew the fickleness of his countrymen ; he foresaw that reaction is the necessary result of upheaval. Thus, before the romantic-history drama reached its apogee, he reversed his engine. Now, after many triumphs, he plunged into the dramatic illustration of his contemporary society, tried his hand at what in modern days we would call realism. Of all his dramas these society plays—*Antony*, *Angèle*, *Thérèse*—were, perhaps, the least successful, as “ Travelling Impressions ” were the least noteworthy fraction of his life-work. Keen observer as he was, his fervent nature of tropical descent would play havoc with his logic. Accuracy was the least of his gifts, exaggeration his gravest defect—a defect whose qualities have constituted his claims to immortality. This gigantic mind rebelled against the narrowness of his daily surroundings. His mind lived in regions of gold and colours ; the children of his brain were clad in powdered wigs, in garments silken and velvet ; the piquancy of the beauty-spot, the clanking of armour, and the glitter of sword and foil inspired his pen. So he returned to his early love, and then came that delightful *Marriage of Convenience*, the exquisite “ Silver Key,” the romantic “ Youth of Louis XIV.” (which he never lived to enjoy, for it conquered in 1873 posthumous glory), to say nothing of his dramatised romances, “ The Musketeers,” “ The Tower of Nesles ”—a galaxy the very names of which cover

a column, while its opulence of imagination dazzles the brain.

III

A hundred years have gone since his birth ; for more than thirty years the earth of the little parish of Neuville has covered his remains. Yet to-day he lives amongst every generation of our time, a friend, a creator of many happy hours. Of course, the younger party, no less turbulent than he himself was when he arose as the iconoclast of the Pseudo-classic School—has endeavoured to drag him from his pedestal. They envy his abundance and carp at his historical licence ; they resent their own imaginative impotence, and deny him grace of style. If he were not in his grave they would fain flay him, as they have buried alive that idol of a lustrum, George Ohnet. But for the present his reputation is secure. Every criticism upon his achievements halts in face of the irrefutable fact that, despite its faults, much of his work has survived, and will outlive his detractors. For he possessed the greatest gift of all. He kindled the imagination of the universe, and, by the magic wand of his mind, he has, albeit but for a while, mesmerised high and low. In fact—once more to quote About as he spoke in 1883—“if every one of his readers had but contributed one farthing to his statue, it would not be of stone and bronze—it would be a monument of unalloyed gold.”

JEANNE GRANIER

JULY 20, 1902

I

ON second thoughts I am not so sure that Capus, in his now famous comedy *La Veine*, meant to do anything more than amuse us. When the play succeeded and suddenly became universal property, with one voice people exclaimed, "See, there's a comedy with a moral, and one that will amuse and instruct, instead of causing pain or dismay." The moral was, of course, "that every dog has his day, if he only knows it"; in other words, when Luck knocks at your door, bid it come in and make itself at home. Reading and hearing this, the public went to the theatre with two-fold expectation. They expected to laugh—that goes without saying, for Capus is one of the sharpest shooters in the joyful world of Parisian satirists; but they also expected a spoonful of wisdom wherewith to enrich their views of life. But while one part of these expectations was amply fulfilled, the other did not come off so well. For there was no evidence at all that any of the main characters concerned themselves with the moral; or, if they attempted it, their way of doing it was nowise convincing. After all, the hero of this play was but a kind of Lothario, who, when money rolled in, let his love fly to the winds; who frittered away time and passion on an adventuress, and who returned, sea-damaged and disappointed, to his former mistress

because she was the only woman who could make a man of him. There is not much of the vaunted moral in that, although with a little effort one might distil from it the somewhat trite cynicism that sudden riches are apt to spoil time-honoured associations.

Nor is the *milieu* of Capus's play altogether well chosen. There is something incongruous in the *liaison* of the accomplished barrister with the comely florist, whose grammar is as shaky as her conversation is unpolished. These two may be "wahlverwandt," as Goethe calls it, but they are not of the same fibre, and as the man is inclined to be fickle, it is scarcely astonishing that the first elegant and adventurous woman of a frivolous world should make an easy prey of him. This is not said to belittle the play—as a comedy—but simply to demonstrate how easy it is to discover subtle meanings in things which have been created for the sole object of entertainment. For as a *comédie*, as pure as Parisians are inclined to understand purity, *La Veine* is wholly charming, and the touch of sentiment in the third act, when the hero is soundly doused by his latest enchantress, serves but to accentuate the fascination of this play of brilliant dialogue and pointed epigrams. Capus is, in fact, a born humorist, and if at times he may be tempted to be cynical, he knows how to apply the brake and how to dulcify a bitter reflection with a mellow sequel of human tenderness. And herein, I fancy, is the reason of his success, which was already foreshadowed when, some years ago, he gave *Rosine* to the Gymnase. He is a true Parisian; a refined kind of a "gamin," with a sharp tongue and a soft heart. The combination of both is the chief characteristic of his fellow citizens.

II

What Capus is in the masculine, Jeanne Granier is as a woman. She is "la Parisienne" to her finger tips ; she might be a sister to Réjane—only Réjane by nature would be of Montmartre and Granier of the Boulevards. Granier is unique in her own sphere of gaiety—acute, audacious, uncompromising. Her comely, buxom, well-quilted personality coaxes the hearer into comfort. Her appearance paves the way to merriment. And having thus laid the basis, her progress and conquest are irresistible. She opens her lips, displaying two rows of pearls and a couple of dimples, and something like well-being spreads over every countenance in the auditorium ; she smiles, and people nod and exchange glances of intelligence, as much as to say, "Charming! Charming!!" She laughs—laughs so well that all the cosiness of her body would seem to shake with joy, and the audience falls in harmoniously—loudly if she is boisterous, discreetly if she utters one of those Parisianisms which elicit a blush if given in any other tongue. But Granier can be serious ; she can express sentiment as well as wit. Perhaps that tenderer vein does not run so deep as the brighter one. I have never seen her drawing a tear, nor will she, like Réjane, hold her audience in a tremor. Her whole nature seems to long for the bright side of life. But what she can do is to mark the transition from gaiety into earnestness—is to stay our smiles and just spread that anxious stillness over the house which is eloquent proof of profound interest. Thus, in the great scene of *La Veine*, she almost converted the comedy into drama, so sincere was her grief, so convincing her pleading. And when, after the cloud, sunshine once more revealed the Parisienne in all her radiant gaiety and joy of living, the contrast, more than anything else, made it clear why Granier is the darling of her public. Her art—to sum

it up—is like the rainbow. With that innate bonhomie, that spontaneous brilliancy of hers, she carries us away from the cares and worries of daily life, and for awhile, at least, she rocks us, her docile listeners, into the belief that the world is not so weary after all.

PLAY AND PLEASURE

AUGUST 3, 1902

I

To be quite precise, there has been no *première* this week. We have only had a revival, or I should rather call it a re-animation, for it is but five or six weeks ago since *The Bishop's Move*, by John Oliver Hobbes and Murray Carson, saw the footlights at the Garrick. After the first hearing I liked the play very much—with certain reservations concerning clerical matters—and the acting of Mr. Arthur Bouchier and Miss Violet Vanbrugh elicited something more than banal praise. I wish that I could have dismissed the play with the record of my first impressions. It would have been best for all concerned. But fate and duty willed it otherwise. *The Bishop's Move* was promoted from an ephemeral night devoted to charity to the honours of the regular evening bill, and we had to see it again. Then happened what is often the case when we tumble over head and ears in love at first sight: it is very pretty while it lasts, but it does not last long. The very precipitation of the occurrence provokes reaction. Gradually ardour is tempered by observation, and then little faults seem to surge to the beautiful surface, and as they arise they become magnified until in the end disenchantment takes the place of illusion. Probably the acting had something to do with it when *The Bishop's Move* returned to the Garrick

—the same boards where a week ago the finest *ensemble* conceivable held its sway. I feel uneasy when I think of the contrast, for, frankly, the little comedy, so frail and so graceful, is well-nigh strangled in its second birth by the actors. To say that nobody knew the parts would be exaggeration; but to say that hardly anybody was word-perfect is the truth dulcified with a great amount of moderation—the prompter deserved well of the prompted. Of course when memory shakes the tongue trembles in sympathy, whereafter the discomfited actor hopes to redeem his prestige by “laying on” like Macduff, which makes matters worse, for he who is too emphatic does not convince.

It is not necessary to set any particular actor in the stocks; it is more clement to assume that there were some adverse currents in the air, and that anon a fresh breeze will fortify the players. Meanwhile, I can but repeat that Miss Violet Vanbrugh was delightful as the Duchess, that Miss Jessie Bateman was all sweetness and charm, and that Miss Kate Serjeantson was the *beau idéal* of a prospective mother-in-law. Basta!

II

Having done my duty as a *premiérist*, I will, by your leave, tell you something of my pleasures as a *flaneur*. Whenever an evening of leisure comes my way I wend my way towards the Empire, that true palace of variety and recreation. There is always something exquisite to be seen and something remarkable to be heard. Just now Ludwig Amann's wondrous impersonations of famous characters are to be seen and enjoyed, while Odette Dulac, with that pretty feline air of hers and that pretty, almost plaintive, little voice, calls forth reflections on the omnipotence of diction. For Odette Dulac is above all a *diseuse*. The most indifferent sentimentality of old-fashioned romance becomes a

little work of art on her lips. Her enunciation is crystalline not only in its clearness, but in its intellectuality. She knows what she is warbling, and she makes us comprehend it, while a sober use of gesticulation lends emphasis to her words. Hence her art, which is primarily of the drawing-room and did not ignite her audience at her *début*, has gradually conquered our public. Dulac has become a favourite like Yvette Guilbert before her; the one excels in romance, the other in realism. Both demonstrate to a fault that in France a music-hall singer is not merely an artiste—as we spell it with an *e* to mark a difference—but an artist in the generally accepted sense of the word.

But the crown of the programme is the ballet. The management have indeed every reason to call it *Our Crown*, for it is the finest in a long series of achievements. To me it is a vision of beauty; six times have I seen and heard it—for Wenzel's spirited, tuneful music is not the least part of the feast—and I hope to see it six times more. A great idea has been grandly vitalised, in colour, and in dance. The first part, which is semi-historical, may sometimes transgress the laws of the ballet with its plentitude of living pictures and its vocal interludes by the Stedman boys, while the ugly oleographs of King Edward and Queen Alexandra might be fitly replaced by statuary or bronze, but the rest is wholly delightful. I would fain call it the apotheosis of our Empire symphonised in scarlet, red, and pink. A single little figure in white muslin flits through that roseate picture; it is the bewitching Mlle. Adeline Genée, one of the best dancers of her time, an artist whose talent is equalled by her charms and modesty. Seeing her I constantly thought of Charlotte Wiehe, also a Dane, and not only her sister in art, but her peer in pantomimic gesture and expression. Mdlle. Genée, whose dancing recalls the heyday of the Viennese school, is the life and soul of the ballet, but she never obtrudes her personality. She hovers

over it all like a fairy in the tales of Hans Christian Andersen.

Yet in the midst of choreographic luxury the main theme is not forgotten. Gently, as silken threads are woven into embroidery, the "imperial idea" is again and again introduced into the apotheosis. Now the Canadians, in snow-white, reappear, now the Burmese in ruby, the Indians in sapphire, the Kaaplanders bespangled with diamonds, and as they mingle with the phalanx of beauty in scarlet, red, and pink, there is a vision of colour as caressing as it is unforgettable. Truly, Mr. Wilhelm, who designed it all, and Miss Katti Lanner, who set the poetry in motion, may look with pride upon their work. They have added a touch of dreamland to the mammoth city.

AN AUTHOR AND SOME ACTORS

AUGUST 2, 1902

I

"My husband," said the grass widow, "I hardly knew him. Of course, we lived together for a while, but he always went out, came home, went out, came home again. One fine day he went out and did not come home—*ça y était*." I quote from memory, but even though the quotation may not be textual, it fairly conveys the spirit of Alfred Capus's manner of hitting off a situation in a few words. He is, like our north country cousin, "a man of few words;" long speeches are the exception; terse, caustic repartees the rule. If it be true that words often serve to hide thoughts, then Capus proves that it is equally just to assert that the less verbiage, the more thought. In fact, he owes his fame, in the first instance, to his compact method of jestingly summarising burning questions of the day. He was, of course, a journalist before he scaled the theatrical wall. At one time he might have been fittingly called "jester-in-ordinary" to the *Figaro*. Day by day there appeared a little sketch of his, just a quarter of a column in none too small print. But, as in a spoonful of Liebig's Extract, there was a pound's weight of strength in it. Whether the arrow pointed to a Cabinet Minister, to a literary man, to some topical subject such as the post office, the fire brigade, Panama, or Dreyfus, it hit mostly aright, and by its

dexterity secured a very fair amount of influence for the bowman. Besides, these charming sallies were not merely attractive by their spirit; they were even more so by their form. They were dramatic; they were characteristic. They quivered as much with life as the tongue of the Parisian. One felt the touch of the dramatist born, and it was not long before Capus tried his hand at a full-blown play for the stage, instead of miniature drama in the daily Press. His maiden effort was called *Rosine*, and had a fair success at the Gymnase. There were some indications of that quaint blend of cynicism, humour and pathos, which anon was to render the pen of Capus world-famed. But it did not happen all at once. A few *succès d'estime* followed; also a great *succès de location* (box-office success), *Les Maris de Léontine*; but all that was merely scouting. Prolific and resourceful as he felt himself to be, the author went in for a little versatile training until he came forward with a definite policy in *La Bourse ou la Vie*. Here we have the real Capus, the *Figaro* commentator magnified into four acts—the keen observer of contemporaneous Paris; the gentle chastiser of all manners of humbug and conventions in our midst; the cynic who reads many a huge joke in the tragedies of life; the dexterous manipulator who shows us men and things on their head in order to demonstrate what they are like on their feet. And this mixture of the humorous and the sentimental, in much of which they imagined that they heard and saw themselves, mightily pleased the Parisians. For the time was ripe for a new man, especially for a man who would amuse, and, in his laughter, would be a kind of chronicler of his time. As Rostand was hailed as a deliverer because his *Cyrano* came as an antidote to ultra-realistic drama, so Capus was acclaimed because he neutralised the malodorous atmosphere of the *comédie rosse* and provided a hardier cordial than the coarse pleasantry of *La Dame de chez Maxim* and

her numerous family. Capus, fortunately for him, found the theatrical soil in Paris much in the same condition as Sardou found it forty years before. There was an opening for a new *régime*, for one had had enough of the old. Sardou found Paris sick of romantic flummery, and created what may be termed the precursor of realism in his wonderful comedies of the Second Empire. Capus found Paris sick of indecent gaiety and gay indecency, and he created what I will term the comedy of the twentieth century. Without going into details about his latest plays, *La Veine* and *Les Deux Écoles*—the one very nearly, the other absolutely a masterpiece of its kind—I will attempt to explain the sudden rise of Alfred Capus.

French comedy of the last thirty years has moved between two extremes—too much plot combined with too much thesis, or no plot at all, nor any moral background. The newer formula is, therefore, evident. It would find the golden mean, and provide a plot strong enough to string the acts together, and a semblance of ethical undercurrents to occupy the mind after the curtain's fall. This Capus achieved in *La Veine*, and even more strongly in *Les Deux Écoles*. In both a little moral is entwined around some emotions. But he did not stop at the frame and basis of the plays; he also, wilfully or intuitively, coined a new form of dialogue. In the comedies of Sardou-Dumas-Augier, the author generally speaks from the lips of the characters. They were, as it were, the rostrum of his philosophy. In the neo-realistic school the author is nowhere, and merely reproduces with photographic minuteness the parlance of certain people under certain circumstances. The former style tends to artificiality; the other—unless wielded by a master-hand—is apt to become monotonous and, to the general public, unamusing. Thus again, Capus hit on the happy medium. He let his characters act, behave, and speak in an unaffected, I would fain say Bohemian manner.

As a rule, he shuns all finery of language, all sententiousness on the one hand, and on the other all wanton indelicacies. Nor does he—the *deus ex machinâ*—obtrude his reflections and doctrines. He merely insinuates them. When the people of the play talk about “luck” (*Veine*), or of the two schools of husbands in a certain sphere of Paris society, we know very well that they phonograph, as it were, the voice and views of the author; but his presence is so little intrusive that, like the obedient child, he is seen, not heard. In other words, Capus knows how to clothe his little philosophies in such airy and graceful language that the characters lose none of their vitality, and might in daily life have spoken as they speak in the play. Add to this a truly marvellous power of observation, a kindly vein of satire and *blague*, so dear and peculiar to every Parisian, an ever-present spirit of *tout comprendre c’est tout pardonner*, and it is, I trust, evident whence arises the popularity of Alfred Capus.

II

But Capus himself has been assisted by *la Veine*, by luck. Like all people who succeed unexpectedly, he has found outward circumstances influencing his success. He came at the right time, and he found the right interpreters. At the Théâtre des Variétés there is at the present moment a little band of actors who represent to perfection the very essence of the touch and go of comedy. These actors—such as Jeanne Granier, Marie Magnier, Lavallière, Brasseur, Guitry, Baron—are not, every one of them, merely comedy stars of the first magnitude, but they have by dint of practice and of collaboration, attained a harmony of *ensemble* remarkable alike for its style of deportment and its diction. Whether these actors have at times played in the grand style of poetic drama, or whether,

like Granier, they have done their share in comic opera, whether they hail from the Northern departments, where French is spoken drily, soberly, pointedly, or from the Midi, where the vowels are mellow and the sharp consonants are poured forth in thunderous rotundity; whether they are children of Society, of the Conservatoire, or of provincial boards, they have entirely merged into one style, one diction. And in this respect above all they should be held up to our actors as models. Was it not our own great Gilbert who said that no English actor could speak thirty lines without a flaw? Is it not our every-day observation that on our stage we hear all kinds of accents, from Cockney to Caledonian, from Irish to foreign, that mostly everybody plays by himself as for himself, and that the stage-manager is more competent to deal with scenery and furniture than with the inner meaning of the play? I will not pause to expatiate, for the temptation would lead me into a lengthy disquisition on acting as an art and acting as a mere craft. I simply put the questions to follow them up with the remark that the French actors who have played in the works of Capus have precisely all the qualities the lack of which we bewail in our own. Yet do you think that the profession eagerly grasped at this grand opportunity of seeing the ways of their French colleagues, and becoming wise! Perish the thought. Our actors, saving some few—some very few—notable exceptions, are much too accomplished to learn, much too busy with so-called social duties, and the prospective paragraphic glories afforded by an active London season, to sit at the feet of their neighbours and betters. That is left to critics, who become unpopular when they venture to suggest, be it never so gently, that all our tinselled idols are not golden. But the actor, the one whose calling it is, and whose vocation it should be to follow every manifestation of art with the ardour of a student, who, moreover, could have all this tuition and delight

gratis, *pro deo*—the actor has been conspicuous by his absence, while rows of hungry seats were ready to welcome him. Ah! when there's a star—say a Bernhardt, a Réjane, and the lesser luminaries may catch some of her reflected glory, if only in the notices of “among those present”—then the professionals flock to the box-office, as they would rush towards Society and Royalty. But when there comes a company which only brings a good play and, instead of *one* star, a firmament of theatrical intelligence, the trouble of the game is not deemed worth the candle. And that is why our stage, like other branches of our community, according to Lord Rosebery, suffers from fatty degeneration of the heart.

THE BITTER CRY OF THE OUTCAST ACTOR

AUGUST 23, 1902

I

You may hear it in the season, but you scarcely listen to it. Then there is too much activity, too much sensation in the camp to lend an ear to those who are willing to work and cannot for want of an opportunity. But when the shutters are up, and managers, after having fixed their winter campaign, make holidays like the rest of the well-to-do world, the clamour of the resting professional grows louder and louder. For now the dread reality stares him in the face. He knows that from early autumn until deep into the winter he will beleaguer the managerial office and lounge upon the stage-door mat in vain. "Full inside" is the ominous meaning of the invisible letters on the wall, and as they read it many hardy workers turn away with a heavy heart and anxious forebodings of the misery that begins with debt and ends—Fate alone knows where. True, there are the provinces, there are all our domains beyond the seas, but the former offer but a poor and laborious living to a minority, and the rush towards the latter is so great that (to use the words of an actress) "you must be exceedingly lucky, or, as a woman, uncommonly good-looking, to obtain anything better than an engagement which, after six

months or so, will send you home richer in experience but out of pocket."

Under these circumstances it is not so difficult to endorse the summary which, at a convivial gathering, was pronounced by an authoritative voice. This experienced manager said: "For every character in the cast of a new play in London there are at least thirty applicants, and for every actor (or actress) wanted in all our theatres together there are two too many." In other words, the painful truth is that after providing for the actual requirements of every theatre in the English-speaking world two-thirds of the profession must be of necessity out of work. Perhaps it will be said that such a statement should be digested *cum grano salis*. The manager, by adding the one word "experienced" to his description of actors, might have put a different complexion on the case, and it is only fair to assume that the crowd of aspirants, novices, walking ladies and gentlemen, were in his mind when he spoke. But that nowise alters the situation. In my estimation, everybody who endeavours to earn an honest living on the stage, be he a "star" or a mere "thinker," has a right to be called a professional. And my sympathy is warmer for the small and struggling fry than for those who have climbed up and are often overpaid for their mediocre and well-advertised achievements.

II

There is no need to waste words on whys and wherefores. We all know how the profession has become glutted. It is because nowadays acting is considered a gentlemanly occupation; because Society has voted the stage fashionable; because America, ever launching out towards the Old World, has gained ground on the English boards. Moreover, stage-life is less monotonous and hide-bound than that of clerks, artisans,

governesses, teachers ; it is an occupation that kindles ambition, while it panders to our little personal vanities. To be an actor is to be a free man and an artist—two qualifications which appeal irresistibly to the young generation, and dispel from the outset all dark visions of disillusion and distress. The elastic imagination of youth, aided and abetted by that master-painter, Ambition, sees the horizon in a roseate light. The aspiring actor, like the Romans of the declining Empire, lives to-day careless of to-morrow. For the stage is a mighty siren ; its charms beget forgetfulness of its perils.

But in spite of all attempts to palliate and to minimise the complaint, the fact remains that the present economical position of the actor is deplorable, and that there is urgent need for betterment. How is it to be attained ?—that is the question, and I confess that it is one of the most difficult problems extant. For mere complaint and counsel are of no avail. It is useless to say to the young actor : “Why don’t you go to the City ?” He will not do it, and the City is over-full. It is futile to say to young actresses, “Do what your mothers did, and what is essentially a woman’s destiny. Get married and mind your home.” They will not do it so long as they are quite young, and satisfied with their mirror. For the spirit of emancipation is strong in the girl of to-day. It is no use to exhort Society to keep their damsels and their juveniles, and not to interfere with the bread and butter of hard-working actors. They will not do it. For Society is deeply inoculated by the *bacillus theatralis*, and for the present the virus is proof against all other influences. It is, lastly, no use to say to the American, “Go home, and leave the English stage to the English.” The Americans will not do it. The eagle is wont to spread its wings, and it knows that individually the American actor is superior to his English colleague, and, therefore, in greater demand.

Nor is it anything but a half-measure to find salvation for the unemployed in the creation of one *répertoire* or subsidised theatre. That is but a drop in the ocean. It will serve a few, and leave the others as badly, perhaps worse, off than before.

The true remedy lies in a gigantic alteration of the system. It would mean that every city of the United Kingdom and Ireland, which is now catered for by touring companies, should acquire a theatre of its own and lend it rent-free to a manager, on condition that he maintains a dramatic and a light-opera company on the principle of a weekly change of programme. In Germany every little township of 30,000 souls has a municipal theatre which, on the whole, works on these lines. That is why in Germany the bitter cry of the outcast actor is never heard. There are no unemployed actors there; to be "resting" is, in Germany, nine times out of ten, a "brevet" of incapacity.

What is possible abroad, is it impossible in England? The orthodox conservative will answer "Yes." But then he has also declared, fifteen years ago, that a more or less Continental Sunday would be an unheard of thing in London. And look at our Sundays now! This is essentially the country in which to hammer away and to bide one's time; it is also the country where things run their sluggish course until distress or disaster deeply shocks the public mind, as in the case of the Queen Victoria Street fire.

So far the world at large cares little for our unemployed actors and our decaying drama. On the one hand, we feel satisfied that when we demand actors there is ample supply; on the other, we are told that the flourishing condition of musical-comedy proves to a fault that the public gets the fare which it wants (and deserves).

To go deeper into the question, to urge the need

for reform, is to court a snub, a sneer, or a shrug of the shoulders.

Meanwhile, the ranks of the profession are daily swelling, and the struggle for life of countless women and men is heartrending beyond the power of words.

ZOLA AS A DRAMATIST

OCTOBER 19, 1902

I

"So much to do ; so little done !" With these words Cecil Rhodes is said to have breathed his last. They might have been uttered by that other colossus when he was felled, with the work of vindication in hand, with the labour of love unaccomplished. For Zola's *grande passion* was the stage, and it was the dream of his riper age to devote his leisure to the conquest of it. When, in that famous laboratory of his, friends and disciples lauded the magnitude of his production, the fertility of his genius, he frequently seemed to burke the compliment by allusions to the near future, when he could give all his heart and soul to the drama, the art which he loved best, because his mastery of it was disputed by the majority.

Zola knew better than any one else that his contributions to the stage represented but mere germs of his intentions, and although at the time of their appearance he hotly refuted the attacks on *Les Heritiers Rabourdin*, on *Bouton de Rose*, and *Renée*, he latterly felt inclined to throw them overboard along with all the other adaptations distilled by William Busnach from his novels. He even demurred when I asked for his permission to produce *Les Heritiers Rabourdin* in English, and as the performance by the Independent Theatre was the only bad one in its earlier record, it would

have been wiser to take his wavering "No" for an answer. But the play had succeeded beyond all expectations in Holland, in Belgium, in Germany, everywhere except in Paris, and that carried conviction. To reverse the judgment of Paris was his most ardent desire.

But to one of his plays he pinned his faith. *Thérèse Raquin* he fondled as his pet child. It was, as it were, the pronouncement of his dramatic creed. In it he crystallised to the best of his power and belief the theories which, as a critic and essayist in book and newspaper columns, he had enunciated with dogmatic severity. *Thérèse Raquin* was the first step of naturalism upon the stage, and, according to its author, *Le théâtre sera naturaliste ou il ne sera pas*. These were prophetic words, for since they were spoken, a quarter of a century ago, the stage of the leading nations in matters dramatic—France and Germany and Scandinavia—has capitulated to the naturalistic influence; and if to-day reaction is threatening, the fault lies with those who out-Heroded the master.

II

It often happens in science that the inventing pioneer is eclipsed by one of his followers. And such was the case with Zola, the dramatist. For, in France, not he, but Henry Becque, the author of *La Parisienne* and *The Ravens*, is acclaimed as the originator of the modern school. Yet Becque, like many of the men who foregathered at Medan, and became famous by the productions of their work at the Théâtre Libre, was in the truest sense the ensign of Zola's theories. Becque followed, as closely as practice can follow, doctrines which Zola had been preaching in his famous essay, *Le Naturalisme au Théâtre*. He did away with trickery and plot ("intrigue" is his own,

and the better word); he transformed stage figures from marionettes into lifelike entities; he scorned the philosophical disquisitions of a Dumas *filis*, in which the characters are the interpreters of the author's own thoughts; he endeavoured to let his creatures speak as human beings; lastly, but above all, he endowed his characters with a psychology of their own, regardless of the traditional stage exigencies. In fine, Becque reproduced human nature as he saw it *à travers un tempérament*. And that is precisely what Zola had done before him in *Thérèse Raquin*, only Zola had run in advance of the times, and Zola, disregarding Parisian predilections for tragedy lightened by playfulness, as in *La Parisienne*, had dived into the dominion of human darkness, and chosen revolting crime for his theme, instead of the engaging sin which is the weakness of many mortals.

Hence Becque finally carried the day in the teeth of opposition, while Zola, for the grim sombreness of his colours, was annihilated by the bombardment of infuriated criticism. "Horrible melodrama" was the cry set forth on all sides, and with these two words the work was condemned, its character denigrated, its ethical basis of existence rent to tatters. "Horrible melodrama," that was the reply to the man who had the courage of his convictions, and who had embodied them in his play.

Here in England, too, when *Thérèse Raquin* followed in the wake of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, and all stage-land was in a ferment, the cry was taken up. For here again the play came before its time; had not our own Pinero been obliged to inflict a "happy ending" on his *Profligate* in deference to orthodox taste?

But now, as then, I and many with me, maintain that never was a slur less merited by honest work. "Horrible" it was, yes, in the great, the classic sense, as it was accepted by the dramatists of ancient Greece. The tragedy of guilt and expiation is never dissociated

from the horrible. But it was not melodrama—not the penny-catching mirror which distorts all forms of nature for the sake of a thrill or trill of laughter. Zola modestly describes his work as a drama—for in France tragedy is generally paired with poetry—but what he really meant was tragedy, as true, as deep, as awe-inspiring, as the pangs of human conscience have engendered.

And not merely in its conception, but in its very form and style, this play of *Thérèse Raquin* towers above melodrama; and if it is debased and overwrought, the fault is the players', who have not learned to discriminate between inner depth and outward effect. Played as it should be, after the precepts of Antoine, soberly, quietly, intensely, without yells and braggadocio, *Thérèse Raquin* could not fail to stir the innermost feelings of men. They might feel anguished, they might feel repelled, that is no concern of art, for art is catholic, and in its republic there is room for all phases of life, provided that they be true. *Thérèse Raquin* was true to the extreme of rudeness. It was true in its characters, true in its evolution, true in its materialisation of conscience. Above all, it was true to the faith of its creator. And for that, small as his contribution has been to the literature of the drama, it behoves us to honour him; and for that, added to all the other considerations which constituted his greatness, we bewail the promise unfulfilled.

LOOKING BACKWARD AND FORWARD

DECEMBER 31, 1902

I.

HERE is the annual report in a nutshell :

DEBIT SIDE.

Pinero, Gilbert, Carton, and Haddon Chambers have remained silent. Mr. H. A. Jones, much to our regret, has courted failure in *The Princess's Nose* and *Chance, the Idol*, Mr. Marshall has indifferently renovated Scribe's *Bataille de Dames*, and sorely tried logic in *The Unforeseen*. Mr. Esmond has marked no progress in *My Lady Virtue*, nor has Mr. L. N. Parker (with Mr. Boyle Lawrence) in *The Heel of Achilles*. Mr. Sidney Grundy has collaborated with Paquin and four other dressmakers in retrimming *Frocks and Frills*. Mr. Anthony Hope has missed the chance of a lifetime in his timely and fairly amusing but undeveloped *Pilkerton's Peerage*. Mr. Basil Hood has justified England's opposition to bounty-fed sugar by the artificially sweetened *My Pretty Maid*. Mr. Hall Caine's *Eternal City* has made his critics rejoice, the more so as this man of genius graciously allows them "to wallow in the backwaters of their own incompetency." Mr. Marion Crawford, in *Francesca da Rimini*, has lost a

grand opportunity of convincing foreigners (as well as his own countrymen) that our drama is really better than its reputation. Mr. Wilson Barrett, in his bewildering *Christian King*, has driven another nail in the coffin of melodrama, while Mrs. Humphry Ward proved in *Eleanor* that desiccated novels of literary pretensions are apt to make very tedious plays.

CREDIT SIDE.

Once more Mr. Stephen Phillips heads the list as the dramatist of the year, by virtue of quality if not by the numerical achievement of a long series of performances. His *Ulysses* was certainly not quite satisfactory—in parts it was amateurish—but there was imagination in it, and a grace of expression which exalted it above the commonplace. His *Paolo and Francesca*, again, is the only play of the year that will live beyond its stage career—the one test of excellence. There is no need to recapitulate its merits. It was a noble work, and the one that redeems a singularly infelicitous campaign from the opprobrium of absolute barrenness. Mr. J. M. Barrie, now the paragon-playwright of the nation, had two successes—*Quality Street*, and *The Admirable Crichton*. The former has the passing charm of pleasant sentimentality and dexterous artifice; the other, thanks to Mr. H. B. Irving's splendid acting, has become "the success of the season," although the subject is contestable and the treatment savours much of pantomime. In the anæmic state of our drama two such works may pass muster, but the next generation will know them not. Among other successes, the amiable *Bishop's Move*, by Mrs. Craigie and Murray Carson; *The Country Mouse*, by Arthur Law; the fine and breezy *If I were King*, by J. H. McCarthy; *Mrs. Willoughby's Kiss*, by Frank Stayton; the fairly promising *Finding of Nancy*, by

Netta Syrett ; *A Married Woman*, by Frederick Fenn ; and Mrs. Ryley's charming *Mice and Men*, deserve a word of appreciative remembrance.

PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT.

After due audit of debit and credit the *net result* is : One home-made play (*Paolo and Francesca*) to be placed in reserve in order to strengthen the goodwill of the British drama.

DIVIDEND : Nil.

CARRIED FORWARD : A certain amount of hope discounted by misgivings.

II.

So it was a very bad year, and while as usual we shout, "The King is dead," we may well place a query after the sequel, "Long live the King (?)". It is really a mournful work to read over one's impressions of the last twelve months. So much money spent, so much brain-power used up, for what ? For a dozen plays worth seeing, and for a century not even worth forgetting. And that is the production of a realm of forty millions, to say nothing of colonies and dominions beyond the seas.

Ah ! it is no work of glee on this last day of the year to express the unpleasant truth. But told it must be "lest we forget." For the root of our misery lies in the indisputable fact that our public does not care a rap for the theatre in its serious aspects. Speak of a mission, and you are laughed at. Speak of educational power, and you meet with a sneer. Speak of elevation of the masses, and the reply is a ditty from the latest musical comedy. The cry is : People no longer care to be entertained in the better sense of the word, they want to be amused. Life without is serious enough ;

we want to laugh in the theatre, as if laughter were the only form of amusement. As if a cultured mind, ready to read a serious novel in leisure hours, were unfit to appreciate a play that does not trade on facile music, on woman's charms, and on dialogue spiced and peppered with subdued *double entendre*. And then behold the contradiction; as soon as a playwright of celebrity, say a Pinero or a Jones, writes a good play—a *Mrs. Tanqueray*, a *Judah*, no need to name the rest—the self-same public which wants to be amused only, flocks to the playhouse, applauds, and actually discusses the main theme because for the nonce its brain has been nourished and whetted by the contact with intellect. Why is that so? Simply because the public, in this country, is docile in art as in many other things. Urge upon them that a thing is fashionable, and they will know no other. They are taught to adore "label." A publican (and a sinner) was once accused before the magistrate for selling inferior brandy from a Martell bottle with three stars, and his apology was, "What does it matter, your worship? They look at the bottle, not at what is inside." That publican hit the nail on the head. If those whose duty it is to lead the public would be more indulgent towards the manifestation of art and less hyperbolical in their praise of entertainments, whose proper place is the music-hall or the Barnum show, instead of the theatre; if they were more severe on the prurient, and more broad-minded in the contemplation of great ethical subjects; if there were one law for every one, be he a popular actor-manager or a well-intentioned new-comer still believing in "art for art's sake," we would soon get onward. But at present we are under the sway of the "label." We are not guided, we are encouraged to drift with the public taste—hence our drama is, as William Archer once put it, in the doldrums.

And let no one warm up the hackneyed excuse, "The drama's laws the drama's patrons give," lest

they be shamed by the answer, "Look at our music."

Seventeen years ago in music and in drama we were the least considered nation of Europe. We were "immortal" for the opposition of the *Daily Telegraph* and other papers to Wagner. Then revolution set in with a vengeance. A few men led the attack, and in less than a decade public taste was entirely reformed. To-day London ranks in music with Paris, with Leipzig, with Munich, with Milan. We followed in the wake of all Europe. We have learned to love music, to worship it as a factor of our national life.

Shall we not once more follow in the wake of all Europe and recognise that Music and Drama are twin sisters—that they are equals in the expression of the good, the great, the beautiful ?

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